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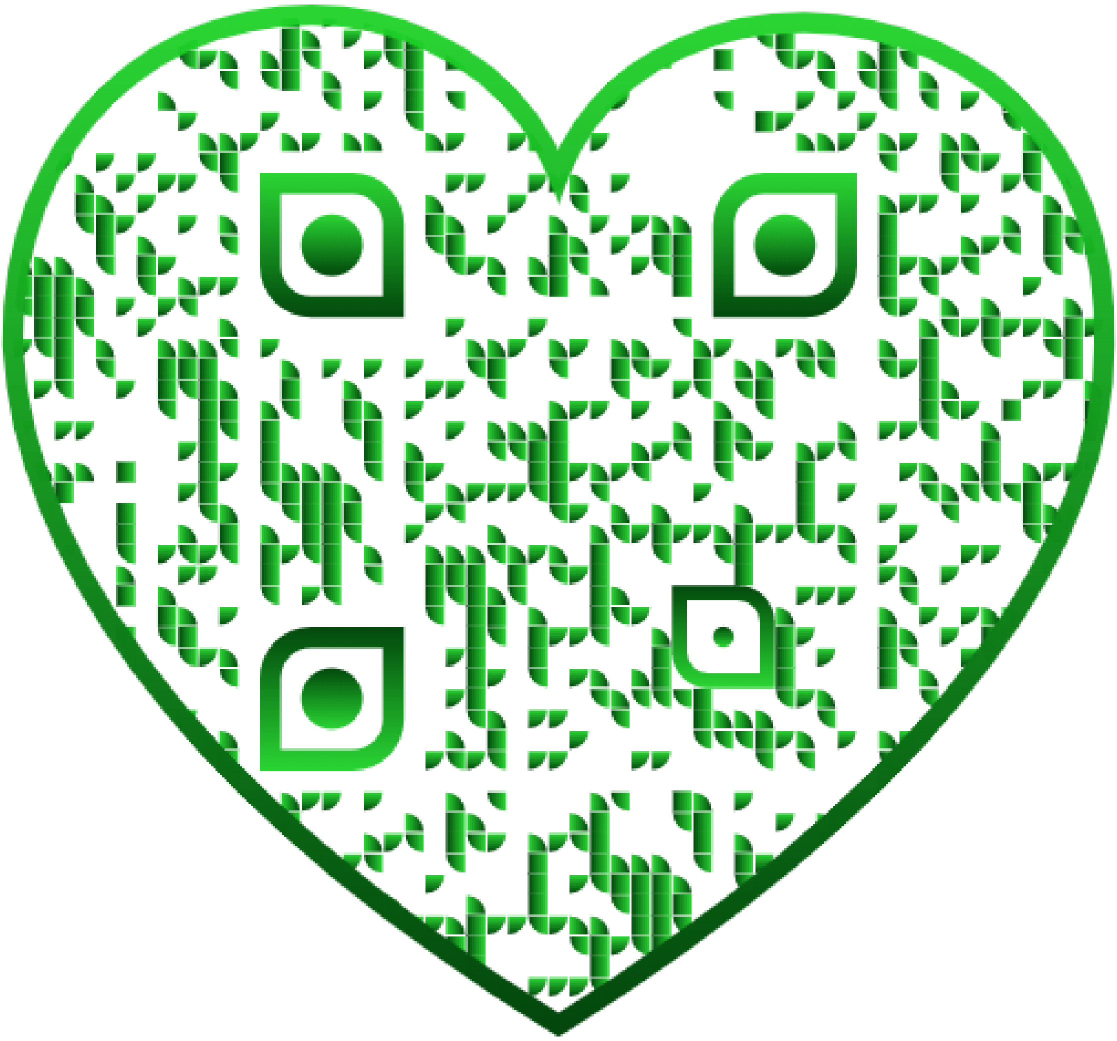

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A warm welcome

Make time for gardening

I have a very satisfying little mini-rant in my column this issue about the number of times I've heard people say, 'that's the gardening year done' now or 'that's it till next year, when we are not even a full third of the way into autumn and the air is still mainly warm and our gardens abundant.

The so-called 'false autumn' is widely evident in the colour of many trees and shrubs, so that's probably part of the reason so many have jumped so fast into default 'hunker down mode'. The news, doesn't help, but we're not talking about that here thank you, let's focus instead on the fact that there is much to be gained, and to be grateful for, in our gardens right now.

The gorgeous earthiness of the air, the rich warming colours, seed heads fluffy and resplendent in the light, the birds hopping around excitably on the feeders...

Notice also how much we now appreciate the moments of sunshine when it breaks through the clouds and shines brightly on us in between the heavy rain showers, the thunder and who knows what else we might get in one day.

We have to be prepared for almost anything now and work around the weather that we're experiencing at any time. It's no longer a case of exact seasonality as usual - the autumn colours are a result of this year's drought and warmest summer on record, but nature finds a way, as we all do eventually if we look, listen and learn to adapt. There is much hope to be found if we switch off from the news and switch onto the splendour of the natural world.

I imagine that since the ordeal of the pandemic we have developed quicker pathways to separating and hunkering down, but the garden offers so much, and spending time soaking it all in feels so good. Let's keep making time over the weeks and months ahead for this precious activity - to find more excuses to potter, nurture and grow in the great outdoors. We'll be offering lots of ideas to help with this over the issues to come. There is feel-good joy to be found at every time of year if we give ourselves space for it to occur.

Do please write in and let us know any other topics you'd like us to try and include in the future as this is a good time for planning and we do this, dear readers, with you uppermost in our minds, so your emails, letters and messages all count. Also if you feel like sharing some of your own experiences of gardening for wellbeing, then we'd love to hear about them. Please send them to editor@amateurgardening.com.

In this issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors includes Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Andrew Oldham Liz Zorab, Chris Collins, Camilla Bassett-Smith, Rosie Irving, and Toby Buckland.

We hope you enjoy everything we have put together for you.

Please keep writing in. I love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of *AG* continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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Editorial
Editor Kim Stoddart
Deputy editor Ruth Hayes
Editorial consultant Sue Bradley
E-mail: Editor@amateurgardening.com
Website: www.amateurgardening.com

Management
CEO Steve Kendall
Managing director Fiona Mercer
Group publisher Daisy Bury
Group web editor Rachael Harper
Subscriptions marketing manager
Claire Aspinall
Retail director Steve Brown

Any general questions
Kelsey customer service team
01959 543 747
cs@kelsey.co.uk

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Advertisement sales
Head of Commercial Julia Barrass
Julia.Barrass@kelsey.co.uk
Sales Karen Davies
01959 543536 | Karen.davies@kelsey.co.uk

Design
Lee Caple

Production
Head of ad print and design Nick Bond
01732 447006
production@talkmediasales.co.uk

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Amateur GARDENING *141 years of practical advice*

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Contact us:

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4 October 2025

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Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights

Prairie planting is good for the soil and biodiversity

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Plant a prairie to protect your garden

Tough perennials and grasses are the way forward, say Kew experts

The trend of 'prairie planting' continues to be popular and as climate uncertainty grows, its value is increasing.

Prairie planting is the term used for growing a mix of tough, climate-resilient perennials and grasses that mimic the wild beauty of the American prairies.

For the past five years, gardeners at Wakehurst, Kew Botanic Gardens' site in Sussex, have been creating a six-acre prairie and are now showing amateur gardeners how grow these plants on a smaller scale.

With a mix of 75 climate-resilient species of flowering perennials and grasses, they have created a masterwork of climate-proof gardening.

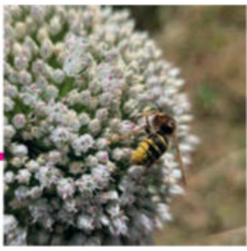
Wakehurst's prairie head gardener, Jack Harrison, says the best varieties to grow include colourful coreopsis (tickseed), echinacea, rudbeckia, wild lupine and aster, while evergreen rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), a member of the carrot family, and grasses such as big and little bluestem add movement and structure.

Because they are all perennial, their roots will bed in, helping to protect the soil and reducing the amount of watering needed.

Jack said: "Less watering is a massive benefit to the climate and to the gardener! You will have to water any newly seeded areas and new plants that go in from pots in their first season, but after that, they really do look after themselves."

Iain Parkinson, Wakehurst's Head of Landscape and Horticulture, added: "The prairie teaches us that when plant communities are allowed to evolve organically, beauty, biodiversity and climate resilience naturally follow."

As the year progresses, wasps move from a protein diet to a sugary one



A bumper year for boozy wasps

It has been a bumper year for wasps, and they are after your booze! At the start of the summer these pest-eating heroes pick off caterpillars and aphids to feed their young.

But as autumn approaches, they turn to sweeter, more liquid things, like rotting fruit and the alcohol it produces to keep them going.

But there's no need to panic, according to Professor Seirian Sumner, author of *Endless Forms: Why We Should Love Wasps,* and Andrew Whitehouse from the charity Buglife.

They say wasps are great for the garden's ecosystem and can be distracted from our picnics by a small morsel of something sweet placed away from the spread.

Seeds to be buried for 100 years

Heritage beans, peas and tomato seeds from Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library will be buried in a special oak capsule and not opened until 2125 as part of the anniversary celebrations of The King's Foundation.

The vegetable seeds have been grown in the gardens at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland, the headquarters of The King's Foundation, which was started by His Majesty King Charles in 1990.

Catrina Fenton, head of the Heritage Seed Library, said: "The work of the foundation and King Charles III in promoting and protecting sustainability, heritage skills and nature closely aligns with our own so we're delighted to be involved in this project."

Right: Some of the seeds that will be sealed inside the oak time capsule for 100 years

Award-winning garden moves to Liverpool

An award-winning garden designed to support and celebrate neurodiversity has opened at the University of Liverpool.

The ADHD Foundation Garden, which won a silver-gilt award at the 2025 RHS Chelsea Flower Show, has been relocated permanently to the university's south campus.

The garden, designed by Katy Terry, offers a calming, sensory-rich space for students, staff, and visitors to pause, reflect, and connect with nature.

It invites visitors to explore new perspectives on neurodiversity, inspired by Katy's own ADHD diagnosis.

University of Liverpool Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tim Jones, said: "It offers a quiet place for reflection and escape, and it celebrates both the incredible diversity of plant life and the unique strengths of neurodivergent minds."

Above: Prof. Tim Jones of Liverpool University opens the award-winning ADHD Foundation Garden

Gardeners at the St Paul's Community Garden in Bristol with their NGS Community Garden plaque

Community gardens urged to apply for NGS grants

Help your communal space win a National Garden Scheme award

Community gardeners are in with a chance to win funds for their plots thanks to the National Garden Scheme (NGS).

Applications for the 2026 Community Garden Grant run by the NGS and supported by the Julia Rausing Trust opened on Monday, September 15 and close on Monday, October 20. Due to the popularity of the initiative, only the first 300 applications will be considered.

These grants provide funding to community groups in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands to create or complete a garden or similar project, such as an allotment, for the benefit of the local community or charitable group.

This past year, 114 community garden projects received grants between £1,000 and £5,000, totalling £288,876.

National Garden Scheme Chief Executive, George Plumptre, said: "We welcome applications for projects that foster diversity and/or support people with physical or mental disabilities."

TV presenter, garden designer and National Garden Scheme ambassador, Danny Clarke, aka The Black Gardener, said: "Participating in an allotment or community garden can give meaningful social connections. I have noticed how these spaces can bring people of all generations, cultures and backgrounds together."

Full details are available at ngs.org.uk/who-we-are/community-garden-grants/

New upland nature reserve for Shropshire

More than 1,000 hectares of rare upland habitats, where endangered bumblebees fly and ghostly warriors and faerie queens roam, have become the UK's newest nature reserve.

The Stiperstones Landscape National Nature Reserve will safeguard hills and heathland, ancient woodland, bogs and acidic grasslands on the edge of the English-Welsh border.

Rare wildlife found here includes the bilberry bumblebee, which depends entirely on bilberry flowers for nectar and pollen.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said: "Collaboration across this landscape will protect the upland heath and ancient woodland, conserving rare species while also creating more opportunities for local people to experience the joy of nature first-hand.

The 1,562-hectare sanctuary preserves ancient quartzite tors steeped in Saxon legend, where Wild Edric and his fairy queen Godda are said to still gallop whenever England faces peril!

Above: Stiperstones Landscape National Nature Reserve is a biodiverse haven

Heritage carrots come in a wide range of colours

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Join *AG* in a great carrot celebration!

Help *AG* celebrate British Carrot Day on October 3 by sharing your carrot successes and failures and favourite recipes with us.

Each year farmers sow 22 BILLION carrot seeds, producing enough to give each person in the UK 100 carrots a year.

Fourth generation carrot farmer Will Hunter, one of six farmers who helped found British Carrot Day, said: "It's not just recipes and nutritional information - carrots are especially high in Vitamin A, Vitamin K, and fibre - we want to share their field-to-fork journey; the story of the farmers who grow them."

Share your carrot stories and recipes with us at editor@amateurgardening.com

Use outdoor yoga to boost wellbeing

Wellbeing experts at Yoga Daily are encouraging people to go outside and de-stress.

They say that even five minutes in a garden or park can help recharge our batteries and let our bodies release tension.

Helpful actions include breathing deeply and slowly as you walk, noticing the different colours around you, listening to the sounds of birdsong and the wind in the trees and grasses, and enjoying the natural textures of outdoor spaces.

A spokeswoman for Yoga Daily said: "Use this mini-practice before big meetings, after a long day, or anytime you feel scattered; it's like a nervous system reset in fewer than two minutes."

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Right: **De-stress and relax with mindful time outside**

Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with AG's gardening expert **Ruth Hayes**

This garden border is thriving but needs taking in hand so all the plants have room to grow healthily Inset: These sea holly seedlings will need moving this autumn

Taking stock of my long autumnal to-do list

The garden's rhythm changes as cooler, damper weather arrives

In her prime, my mum was an inveterate preserver and come autumn the house would be redolent with the sweet scent of bubbling fruits and the vinegary tang of chutney making.

I've followed in her well-preserved footsteps by making pickles from whatever veg we've been overwhelmed by, but until this year I avoided jamming, slightly daunted by the 'science' involved that required things like 'pectin' and 'the wrinkle test'.

Cut back dead stems but leave some as protection for insects

However, our fruit trees, canes and bushes have been so laden down I've had little choice but to pop on my big chef's pants and get jamming. And what fun I've had!

In the space of a few busy weeks 'if it falls from a tree, jam it' has become my motto and at the time of writing have made enough jars of jumbleberry, greengage/plum and fig jam (plus fig chutney) to cover family gifts this Christmas.

I can't quite believe that thoughts are already turning towards the year's end when I'm nowhere near ready to bid this golden summer we've had farewell.

But as I observe the garden and notice that the days are growing shorter and cooler, the light more mellow and the shadows longer, I know that the seasonal roster of jobs is continuing to turn.

Thoughts are moving therefore towards getting our more vulnerable plants ready for winter, either lifting them from the borders and moving them undercover or giving their roots an insulating mulch.

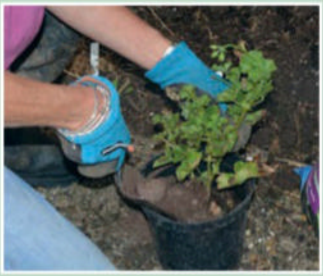
Then there are borders to tackle, including one that has become seriously out of hand this summer. A sea holly has self-seeded right where the lawn meets the bed, so needs moving, and other perennials have crowded out their neighbours and need splitting, their divisions moved elsewhere or given to neighbours.

Others, such as a poor delphinium that was smothered by a helianthus that decided this was the year it would really grow with gusto, have been lifted and potted up in the hope they will revive and survive until next spring.

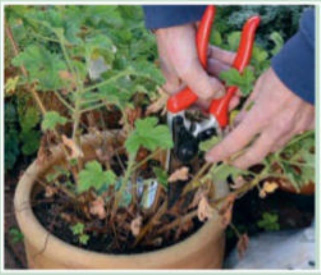
It will be a busy few weeks, but I love being outside in the warm wistfulness of autumn, as the leaves turn and the berries shine and we start to lay to rest another year.

Moreover, I can reward my labours with jam on toast or a cheese and pickle sarnie - now we're talking!

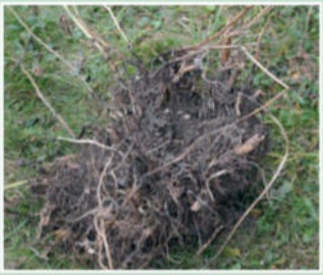
And so my autumn plant prep begins!



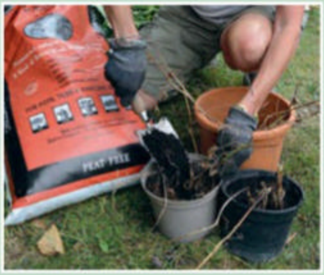
1 Pot up tender pelargoniums and overwinter them in a greenhouse, porch or cool room.



2 Cut back the stems of pelargoniums to 10cm (4in) and use the offcuts as late cuttings.



3 I lifted this poor overgrown, dehydrated delphinium and divided the rootball into three.



4 Each piece has been potted up in Dalefoot compost and I'm keeping my fingers crossed they rejuvenate.

Summer-warm soil that's been dampened by autumn rain creates perfect conditions for planting bulbs

Look sharp and buy your spring bulbs

Act quickly before the most popular varieties are snapped up

Spring bulbs will have been available in the shops and online for several weeks now, and if you haven't already bought yours, I'd look sharp because the most popular varieties will be snapped up before you can say '*Iris reticulata*'.

I'm going to try and not buy any more this year as the garden is full of them and I also lifted and stored some allium bulbs earlier this year when I re-organised a border.

Though having said that, I do rather fancy naturalising some camassias and snakeshead fritillaries around our fruit trees… watch this space!

Bulbs are one of the easiest ways of bringing your garden alive in spring, whether you grow them in pots, in borders or naturalise them in areas of your lawn.

Camassias look fabulous in beds and naturalised in lawns

Whether you are looking for fiery tulips or more calming hues of narcissi, chionodoxas or sweet blue camassias, there is something for every taste and position and their clumps should proliferate as they mature over the years.

If you garden on heavy soil that's prone to sitting wet, I recommend opening it up with plenty of well-rotted manure or compost and grit to improve its drainage.

If this isn't possible, grow bulbs in pots of peat-free compost and raise them up on feet so excess water can escape.

Bulbs should be planted roughly two or three times as deep as they are tall, and one bulb's width apart. They do best in a sunny spot, and many varieties won't flower so well if they have too much shade.

Autumn lawn care

Repair the ravages of a dry summer

Edging immediately neatens the appearance of the lawn and borders

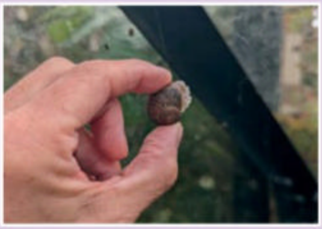
- Lawns have taken a battering this hot, dry summer, but hopefully they will bounce back once cooler, damper autumn conditions arrive.
- So don't waste water on them as they will start to green up again once the rain comes.
- Edging creates neat boundaries and removes straggly grass and weeds encroaching between borders and lawns.
- Scarifying, or raking the surface of the lawn, removes the build-up of dead grass and moss, letting more light, air and moisture down to the grass roots and boosting its health and vitality.
- Make sure blades are high when you mow to prevent damage to the dry soil underneath.
- Once the wetter weather arrives, but before it gets too cold, you can start remedying bare patches by overseeding them.
- Even better, replace the missing grass with robust, climate-resilient alternatives such as creeping thyme or chamomile that will release an attractive fragrance when walked on.

Use a rake to remove dead grass and moss

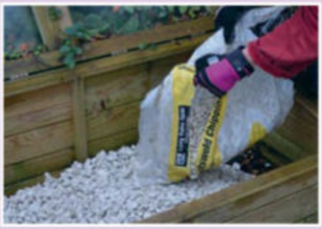
Getting undercover areas ready for the winter

1 Make sure your greenhouse is clean before overwintering plants inside. Wash the windows to let in maximum light too.

2 Make sure there is good air circulation around plants to stave off fungal diseases. Close doors and windows when the temperature drops.



3 Check every nock and cranny for pests and old plant debris. Use plant labels to winkle out stubborn, old squashed tomatoes!



4 Hardy plants can overwinter in a cold frame. I find it's really helpful to line it with gravel to deter slugs and snails.

Planting forced bulbs now will give indoor colour and scent during the shortest days Inset: **These bulb shoots look weak but will quickly green up in the light**

Planting indoor bulbs and lifting gladioli

Planting and storing bulbs and corms for a colourful future

I'm going to keep myself busy with bulbs and corms as we move more firmly into the autumn months, lifting some to store overwinter and planting others for indoor scent and colour when we need it most.

Forced bulbs, such as hyacinth, crocus and 'Paperwhite' narcissus, are often planted in early autumn to flower around Christmas or early in the new year, brightening the home when there's precious little going on outside.

These bulbs have been specially chilled before sale so they 'think' the cold weather of winter has been and gone and are ready to shoot, grow and flower months before their ordinary garden counterparts.

They are best planted in bulb fibre that has been formulated to drain well so it doesn't become waterlogged and start to smell bad.

Once the bulbs have been planted, they are watered and then put in a dark place - I use an empty drawer or unused cupboard - and checked every few weeks until they start to sprout.

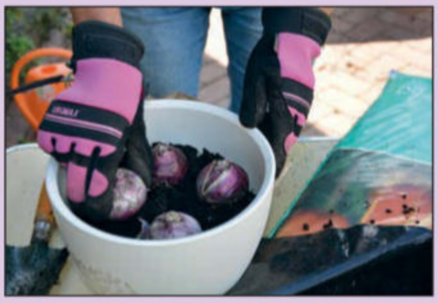
These first shoots will be an unhealthy pale green, but they will soon strengthen and become a stronger colour when exposed to sunlight.

Winter can be cruel to less hardy bulbs, such as gladioli, so I have lifted our corms and stored them so they don't rot and die in the cold, damp soil over the next few months.

They will spend the cooler months in a net bag in the shed, where they will be well ventilated and safe from rodents.

I'll replant them in late spring when the temperature climbs reliably above freezing at night.

Forcing bulbs for winter scent

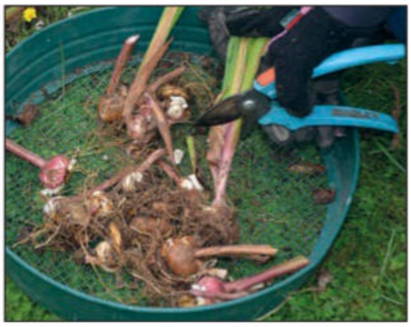


1 Plant bulbs in pots, not touching each other, with just their tops visible above the bulb fibre. Water the pot, then carefully tip it to let excess water trickle out before storing it.

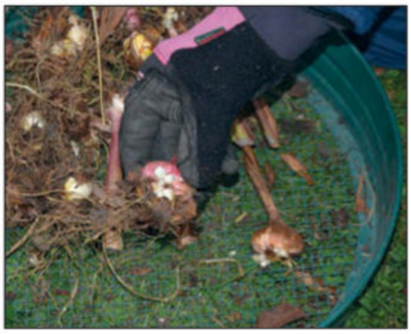
2 Store the planted bulbs in a dark place (drawer, cupboard or lightproof plastic bag). Check them every so often and bring them out when they have sprouted.

Lifting gladioli corms

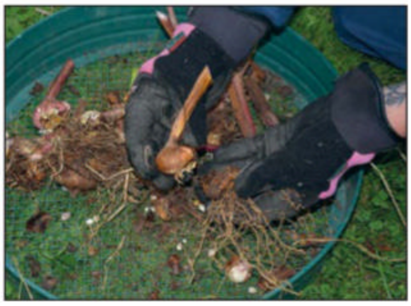
Only store the healthiest ones



1 Carefully dig around and lift the corms and cut their leaves to make a stub 6 to 8cm (3 to 4in) long.



2 Wipe off the soil and make sure the corms are healthy - discard any that are soft or look rotten/mouldy.



3 Carefully twist off the old corms and compost them, leaving healthy fresh ones intact.

4 Store them in a tray to dry for a few weeks, then hang them up. Check them regularly during winter and dispose of any that have gone bad.

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Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Radiant raspberries, perfect aubergines, basil leaf harvests and keeping beans happy

Lucy explains how to make the most of the next few weeks

I don't know if this resonates with any of you, but my summer raspberries weren't up to much this year, as we had a prolonged dry spring and summer in Essex. However, my autumn raspberry bed has more than made up for it and I've been picking punnet after punnet of them since early August. There are still plenty of fruits on them now, so I thought it high time to spotlight these later-cropping canes (the summer types already get plenty of coverage!).

Let's address the fundamental question: what's the difference between summer and autumn raspberries?

Of course, the name refers to their harvest period, so let's look at why certain varieties crop in summer, and others in autumn, because this determines their care.

Summer raspberries crop on last year's stems or 'canes'. Because the canes grow one year then crop the next, they have in essence a head start and can therefore bear fruit in June and July.

Autumn raspberries, however, crop on this year's canes, so the canes have to grow from soil level, then flower, before they can produce fruit. Consequently these fruits aren't ready until August, but then plants can continue cropping well into October.

Summer raspberries have more complex pruning and training needs (you have to prune out old canes and tie in new ones onto sturdy supports, each summer). The huge benefit of autumn raspberries is that their pruning couldn't be easier: simply cut down all canes to soil level in winter.

Also, they are free-standing so need no support or training at all – simple!

Autumn raspberries are happiest with their roots in cool, moist shade (an organic mulch helps) and their tops in the sun – just avoid overly dry or very boggy sites. Kept weed-free, a bed will give decent yields for up to a decade (November is prime planting month).

As for varieties, my favourites are 'Polka' (a large-fruited, tasty red) and 'All Gold' (a very productive yellow-fruited type). Himbo Top ('Rafzaqu') is also reputably very good.

So, don't let summer raspberries steal the show, give autumn-fruited types a go – I promise, you won't be disappointed.

Lucy is enjoying a bumper harvest of autumn raspberries Inset: **Lucy's favourite raspberries are 'Polka' and yellow-fruited 'All Gold'**

Pick aubergines in their prime

✿ Every year I grow at least a couple of pots of aubergines (this year I'm growing my favourites, 'White Knight' and 'Violet Knight' – they're both F1s and very productive).

Also, every year I get asked a particular question: 'how do you know when aubergines are ripe?' – and it's a good one!

You see, the quandary comes about because they look exactly the same when they're ripe as when they're immature – there are no tell-tale skin colour changes or scents to look out for.

So, my solution is to grow a reliable favourite variety, and to 'get your eye in'. Growing one variety and really getting to know it allows you to understand how large the fruits can get. Getting your eye in means, for me, watching the individual fruits to see when they stop swelling as even within one variety, some fruits grow larger than others.

An absolute given though, is to pick aubergines before the skins wrinkle and lose their shine. These two clues indicate fruits past their best.

Lucy harvesting some of her favourite varieties of aubergine 'White Knight' and 'Violet Knight'

All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

Step by step Harvest and preserve basil

If, like me, you've got an addiction to pesto pasta, it's straightforward to preserve basil so that you can be self-sufficient in home-made batches of the scrumptious sauce all winter long. I'm going to presume that if you love pesto, you've grown yourself a huge forest of basil. Now, with cold nights imminent, is a great time to get that harvest safely in:

Sweet basil

1 Firstly, harvest your basil. I've been growing sweet basil 'Aroma' for years as it's vigorous, trouble-free and tasty – I'm sure you've got your favourites too. If you've been regularly harvesting basil all summer you'll have encouraged lots of leafy growth, rather than flowers. Simply cut or snap off the shoots and remove any woody stems.

2 I don't wash my basil, I just pick through it to remove any spoiled parts (but feel free to wash it if you like). Luckily, I also have an addiction to Thai takeaways so have amassed an impressive collection of plastic tubs and lids (thoroughly washed, of course). I've learnt that one tubful of basil leaves makes me a family-sized portion of pesto.

3 You can simply place your portioned tubs into the freezer, but if space is lacking, try this instead: add basil leaves to a large freezer bag, seal then freeze it for 24 hours or more. Remove from the freezer and immediately scrunch the bag in your hands to break up the basil. Then either leave the foliage in this bag or decant into smaller, portion-sized containers.

Top tip

Stop burnout in climbing beans

✿ Squeeze a few more weeks of life out of your climbing French and runner beans before the frosts hit come October (or, with luck, November). Give the extensive roots a good soak if they're dry, adding a balanced liquid feed like Growmore to supply a late-season nutrient top up.

Also, foliar feed the leaves with liquid seaweed (choose an overcast, not sunny day) and check over plants thoroughly for any lurking old pods – you often find them hiding at the bottom of the plants.

Remove these promptly because old, seedy pods prohibit the production of more flowers and beans.

If your plants have been totally neglected, water and feed as I've described above, and strip off all the pods that you can find, young and old. This will give plants a brief recovery period for a final harvest in late autumn.

Right: Lucy explains how to get more out of your beans over the next few weeks

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Why not try...?

Daikon radish

✿ If you are familiar with this type of radish (a great variety is 'Neptune'), then you might well be lifting the sizeable roots right now. If not, then a trip to an Asian food store would introduce you to the big brother of our conventional summer radish.

Round, small and red these are not – minowase daikon (also called mooli, Chinese or Japanese radish, and known botanically as *Raphanus sativus* 'Longipinnatus') look more like a white subterranean cucumber, and they lend themselves well to a plethora of recipes including chips, fritters, slaws, stir fries, dumplings and pickles.

The mild, juicy flesh tastes pleasantly (but not overpoweringly) of pepper and one radish can go a long way! They make an ideal polytunnel crop, a sowing made in August or September bulking up beautifully come spring. Of course, sowings outside also work well – started off in April or May they'll be full-sized by now.

You can sow seed for Daikon radish now if you are quick for undercover harvests of this lovely hardy winter radish

5 quick jobs...

1 Is your asparagus foliage (called 'fern') beginning to turn yellow? This is a sign that nutrients are being drawn back into the fleshy roots, ready for winter shutdown. When (and only when) it's turned brown and brittle, cut it down to the base with secateurs and give the bed a quick weed. Then all is in fine fettle for spring.

2 Polytunnel owners, get sowing! This is prime time to start off overwintering crops, such as hardy lettuce, mustard, mizuna, komatsuna, cut-and-come-again kale and turnips.. So, reinvigorate beds by adding garden compost and some blood, fish and bone then make drills and sow in earnest.

3 Tender edibles, like lemongrass, lemon verbena, ginger and prickly pear *Opuntia ficus-indica*, all love warm, sunny autumns outside, but as night temperatures fall below 10C (50F) they benefit from additional warmth. Be ready to move them under cover, and simultaneously reduce watering to deter cold, soggy roots.

4 Are you struggling to put all that glorious garden waste in your compost bin? Then create a compost trench. This old-time method is a gift for small-space growers – just dig a 30cm (1ft) deep trench in a bed that needs compost, bury your waste in it and come spring, this will have rotted down, ready for sowing season.

5 Did you plant second cropping 'Christmas' potatoes way back in early August? Ideally these are best planted in pots so that you can take action when wet weather inevitably hits. Moving the potatoes under cover, so the foliage is kept dry, helps deter late blight fungal infection. That way, your spuds can continue safely bulking up.

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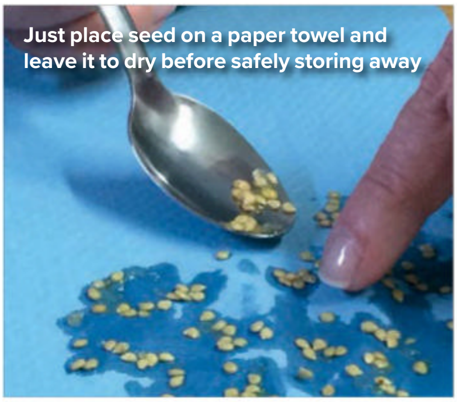
Small space | Big ideas

With **Chris Collins**, Garden Organic's Head of Horticulture

Saving seeds from tomatoes, especially heritage varieties, saves money and can help boost plant diversity



Just place seed on a paper towel and leave it to dry before safely storing away

Easy-peasy tomato seed saving

Chris Collins shares tips for saving seeds from this year's tomato glut

Clearing away the summer crops can feel a bit disheartening, but I always like to think that yesterday's harvest can make tomorrow's dinner - particularly if you save your own seeds.

With tomato seed saving you also get to eat the remainder of the fruit

All images © Garden Organic / Shaun Fellows at Shine Pix Ltd

Seed saving gives you control over what you grow, with plants adapted to your garden conditions, and it saves money. Plus, if you help to preserve heritage varieties, like the ones from Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library, you're helping to boost plant diversity and aid food security in the process.

Saving these seeds is so simple

Every gardener can do their bit by saving their own seeds and, for me, there's no easier place to start than tomatoes. The seeds are easy to harvest and access as they're stored in the fruit, and unlike most seed saving, you can eat the fruit afterwards!

Choose ripe fruit and use a sharp knife to cut the tomato in half on a chopping board. Scoop out the seeds with a teaspoon and separate them from the flesh. Place a sheet of paper towel on a plate and spread the seeds onto the sheet using the back of a spoon.

Pop on a windowsill and leave to dry. Once the seeds are completely dry, you can fold up the paper and place the whole thing into an envelope. Don't forget to label it with the date and variety – it's easy to forget what you've got.

Then you simply need to store it somewhere dry and cool - and in the spring you can place the paper with the seeds onto moist compost to start your plants.

For more advice on organic gardening head to **www.gardenorganic.org.uk**, where you can also find out how to become a member and support the charity.

Chris's Q&As

Q Can you ferment tomato seeds?

A Yes. Tomato seeds are covered in a gel coating, which can sometimes make them tricky to handle. So instead of smearing them on to paper, you can first scoop them into a jar of water, which you stir daily for three days. Once the rougher surface of the seed is exposed and they sink to the bottom, you can rinse them and place them into paper towels as above.

Q How long will my stored tomato seeds last?

A With good storage, tomato seeds can last up to seven years. The two factors that reduce the life of the seed are moisture and warmth, so ensure you keep the seed cool and dry. If you want to store them for longer periods a fridge or freezer will be fine. In both cases use an airtight container, such as a jam jar.

Q Are open-pollinated seeds the best ones to save?

A Yes, these seeds will grow 'true to type', which means they'll become plants that look and taste like their parents. This is important if you love a tangy 'Fox Cherry' or a juicy 'Garden Peach'! Modern F1 hybrids, by contrast, are created from two parents and therefore it's difficult to know what you'll get if you save this seed – and it can lead to disappointing fruits.

6 easy garden-boosting ideas

Editor and resilient-gardening expert, **Kim Stoddart** provides some uplifting practical project ideas for the weeks ahead

All images unless stated © Kim Stoddart

If I hear someone else say, 'that's it, summer's gone, the gardening year is done now' I think I'm going to have to sigh deeply before saying something.

Yes, the seasons change and we have just had the warmest summer on record, so that fresher nip and recognisable earthy smell of autumn air is all the more noticeable, but it's not game over by any means. Admittedly, all the summer's worth of rain falling in quick succession provided a soggy summer closing, but you can see the plants breathing a sign of relief almost as the ground soaks it all up and they drink it in.

There's life aplenty in the garden yet and there are lots of opportunities for maximising the wellbeing benefits that our gardens provide with abundance.

So, with an eye on building resilience using regenerative methods to protect and nurture the wonderful great outdoors and all that live within, let's also look at how we can find some enjoyment and kindness for ourselves in the process.

1 Fill those vases!

The more we pick flowers for indoor displays, the more energy our plants can put into producing them, and looking to see which varieties might carry on flowering is incredibly therapeutic. You might want to cut back foliage a little as you go to help improve airflow and further boost plant health. We have no idea what the weeks ahead might hold weather-wise, but it's still very warm so picking in this way provides so much delight through bloom-laden vases - and who knows how long the fantastic flowering may last.

Do keep some plants back for seed-saving, allowing their energy to go into producing seed heads or pods. This will stop them repeat-flowering, so pick from others instead.

It's lovely to find excuses to create little homegrown floral displays. You don't need dedicated vases either, you can have fun getting creative with what you have to hand, be it cups, bottles or jars.

Chilli plants can be cut back and brought inside to grow on as houseplants over the months ahead

© Shutterstock

Everyday items can be used to display flowers, such as the coffee cup with sweet peas pictured

2 Carry on blooming

You can take the first idea a step further by bringing actual plants inside the home where they can carry on delighting you for longer.

Try it with bedding plants such as petunias, gerberas and pinks, dwarf dahlias and whatever else you fancy. Cut back foliage to conserve the plant's energy and improve airflow, check for any unwanted pest stowaways, and plant on and position on sunny windowsills to encourage more floral delights.

TIP - You can also move other plants inside to grow on such as chillis, herbs and whatever you have the room for and fancy trying. Undercover protection massively extends both ends of the growing season so is worth trying.

Above: **Kim is going to pot up this outdoors lemon verbena to bring it inside the home**

3 Mulch and protect soil

The ground has taken a fair battering this year with many weeks of extreme heat and dryness followed by an almighty amount of rainfall in a short space of time. Well-mulched soil that isn't disturbed by digging is much more able to cope with such extremes because its improved structure and natural soil resilience can hold onto moisture for longer, and better cope with rainfall in excess.

The dryness this year will have been a challenge for any loam, and bare ground is most vulnerable overall. So help feed, cover and improve the structure of soil.

Homemade compost or leaf mould will work perfectly right now and you can place a layer of cardboard underneath if there are weeds growing that you wish to block. Give the soil a good watering if it feels dry beneath the surface, make sure the card is tucked into the edges, let the rain fall and then add your medium of choice, which can be mixed with mole hill soil or old container compost to help bulk it out.

Above: **The rain is bulking up plants and fast, in the case of these marrows which grew in a few days. Time for chutney-making!**

Above: **Do save seed, bringing more delicate seed heads such as lettuce inside to dry INSET Pretty petunia on a windowsill**

TIP Do be careful not to step on soil that has become saturated as this can cause compaction and damage. Use a plank of wood or something that will spread your surface weight and protect the ground below.

IBCs, otherwise known as intermediate bulk containers, can be purchased cheaply secondhand and are great for storing water

A porous pathway will allow water to disperse easily

Above: **Allow flowers to bloom for longer**

4 Think about further ground cover

On the one hand it's important to open up airflow between leaves right now to help avoid mildew and mould, on the other, the ground benefits from plants growing within it, so strike a balance between the two.

Leaving plants in the ground for longer can be beneficial, especially when they keep producing, which they might, so why waste the opportunity? Also, allowing some annual plants to break down naturally in situ is good for soil protection, providing nutrients and for biodiversity as the stems can provide invertebrate shelter and the seedheads food for garden birds.

Consider how much dead wood needs to be removed from trees and the tidying up to be done overall. We are thankfully moving away from the trend of clearing everything away in autumn, and know that items such as dead wood (unless causing an obvious issue such as honey fungus) can prove a valuable home for solitary bees over winter.

Leaves left in a pile somewhere (which doesn't have to be a dedicated leaf mould bin) will be beneficial and this free soil improving resource can also be used as an impromptu mulch over garden beds, encouraging earthworm activity and providing a protective leafy layer in the process.

Liz Zorab offers some excellent suggestions for ground cover plants on page 36.

5 Working with the flow

Now we've had so much rain, water butts which have been empty for months have been filled to the brim. So what to do with all the water they contain, with so much more still to come?

Rainwater collection has so many benefits and can also help reduce the volume that falls and puts pressure on your garden, increasing the sogginess of soil or, worse still, causing flooding.

If you have the room, installing more water butts, or using any form of water collection tubs, is useful. You could also create a feature out of this excess rain, and empty your butts so they are ready for more, by creating a wildlife or dipping pond to help use up the water.

In permaculture, water management is defined by the concept of 'slow it, spread it, sink it'. Hard surfaces are problematic, so using porous pathways and creating opportunities for rainwater to disperse will help immensely.

You could also help channel water away if needs be with the addition of a rill (basically a small ditch which can be hand dug and even filled with gravel) which better enables water to head where you would like it to go.

Above: **Fill bins with rainwater to provide handy watering stations**

6 Seed saving from the veg patch

With heavy rainfall, some of the more delicate seed heads can potentially become mouldy and their seed damaged in the process, so it's an idea to harvest what you can and bring it indoors to further fatten and dry.

The most obvious examples here are lettuce, rocket and any of the beans, coriander and other herb seeds. Just open up pods and leave peas and beans out to dry, and let other seeds dry off before safely storing away in paper bags for next year.

A pond is the ultimate way to collect rainwater

Advertorial feature

David uses his Keder greenhouse to keep summer crops producing well into autumn

Keder greenhouse

Above: The Keder greenhouse enables you to grow a wide range of crops including fruits

How to keep the greenhouse productive into autumn

Expert **David Domoney** explains how his Keder greenhouse enables him to grow summer crops for longer

Extending the growing season is a practical reality with my Keder greenhouse. September brings a generous finish for tomatoes, chillies and peppers, and a consistent routine enables me to keep them cropping for much longer.

Through early autumn, chillies continue to develop flavour and colour. A regular feed rich in potash supports ripening, whilst consistent moisture keeps plants from stalling. I gently cut back dense growth to enable light and air to move freely keeping plants healthy and productive. On bright days, I open my greenhouse's vents to prevent too much humidity buildup. Fully coloured fruits are harvested for immediate use, whilst surplus pods are dried or frozen for later.

Tomatoes perform best with careful upkeep. I strip the lowest leaves to maintain consistent airflow around the stems. New flowers are removed so the plant concentrates its energy into growing and ripening existing set fruit. Watering is best kept even and measured to prevent splitting of fruits. Once I spot tomatoes ripening, I promptly pick them to help the remaining trusses to colour and grow. If light is limited, I thin out the foliage further, so more sunshine reaches the fruit. However, the Keder greenhouse's ability to diffuse the light evenly throughout the space without the scorch risk of glass makes this much easier.

Peppers benefit most from the extra time a protected space provides at this time of year. I support heavier stems with soft ties, remove damaged leaves, and wait patiently for the colours to change. You can choose your preferred colour; from green to red, yellow or orange. That final turn brings sweetness and a clean, glossy finish. A last potash feed helps late fruit reach its best before the light fades.

By balancing light, warmth, feeding and ventilation, these plants keep producing for many weeks beyond the outdoor season. My Keder greenhouse further captures the day's heat and shields against cold nights, effectively prolonging the growing season and keeping the summer flavours coming.

David explains how to grow crops such as tomatoes on into autumn in his Keder greenhouse

For further details on the Keder Greenhouse range, visit **www.kedergreenhouse.co.uk** email **sales@kedergreenhouse.co.uk** or call **01386 49094**

All images © David Domoney

Traditional daffodils are familiar to everyone, even non-gardeners, but there are many unusual varieties to choose from

16 daffodils with a difference

© Shutterstock

Expert **Camilla Bassett-Smith** shares her top recommendations and growing tips

There is perhaps no more widely recognised flower than the daffodil, that distinct dancing delight that needs no ID card! Ask any of your non-gardening friends what they look like and a yellow trumpet sashaying in the spring sunshine would instantly come to mind. But with more than 27,000 different cultivars, there is a plethora of petalled possibilities, just waiting to be planted this autumn.

Daffodils are categorised into 13 different divisions, so a variety of shapes, sizes and colours are available, with many carrying the most sensational scents. Apart from yellow, you can expect to find orange, red, green, peach, white and pink making an appearance in some form or other.

The first pink cup was introduced in the 1920s - 'Mrs R. O. Backhouse' named after the wife of celebrated breeder of the time, William Backhouse. This cultivar has this year been the subject of an RHS Daffodil Diaries Campaign, with members of the public sending in their possible sightings, which I have been busy verifying alongside two fellow daffodil devotees.

There have thankfully been many potential candidates for this rare beauty who inspired a host of other soft pink introductions to follow in her footsteps. It must be said here that when we say pink, we are not talking vivid Barbara Cartland tones, but rather the gentle blushed cheeks of a regretful small child who has unintentionally decapitated your prized dahlia!

Packing a double-petalled punch

Speaking of dahlias, here is a flower for which double daffodils could easily be mistaken, for the Division 4 Narcissus group sees large rounded affairs overloaded with petals and held strong by sturdy stems.

Many of these are bred from one of my historical favourites called 'Mary Copeland', a rather more delicate double with the most delightful fragrance, in soft cream with orange/scarlet centres. The modern-day doubles certainly pack a petalled punch, the late great Christopher Lloyd noted that they 'may seem like an unwelcome aberration, but when the doubling is loose yet even, they have their own poise'.

The beauty of planting daffodils over tulips is that you have a guaranteed return year after year. Think of them as investment plants, bringing more value to your gardens as they multiply naturally as time passes. Like art, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and we all have different tastes, but by pursuing a selection of daffodils which are a little out of the ordinary, you can guarantee botanical assets your neighbours will surely covet.

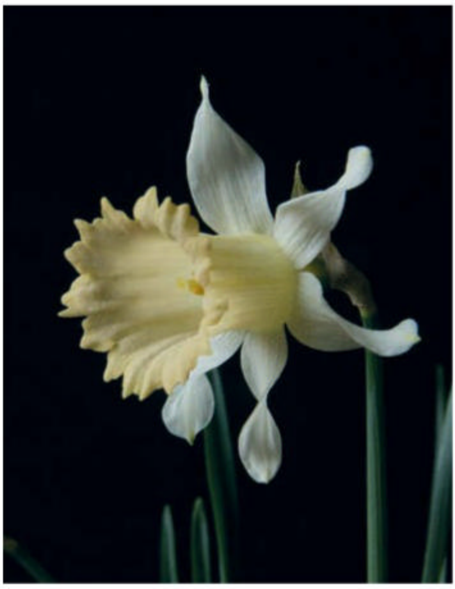
▶

© Camilla Bassett-Smith

Above: **Daffodil devotee Camilla Bassett-Smith with some of her favourite spring flowers**

Camilla's top recommendations for daffodils with a difference

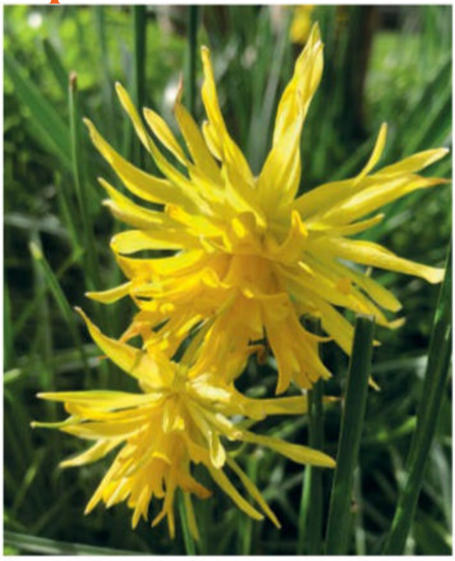
'Peach Twist'



© Anne Wright Dryad Nursery

A most head-spinningly unusual new introduction. The propellor-like petals spiral as if preparing for horticultural take off, ruffling the edge of the pretty trumpet which matures to pale peach. It is already an award winner, receiving the Ralph B. White Memorial Medal from the RHS last year!

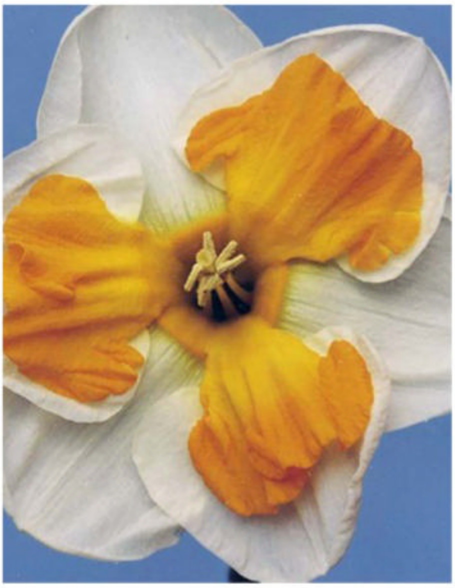
'Rip van Winkle'



© Camilla Bassett-Smith

Quirky and full of character despite its short stature, this is spiky, bright and like a sparkler. An early bloomer with a healthy horticultural eccentricity.

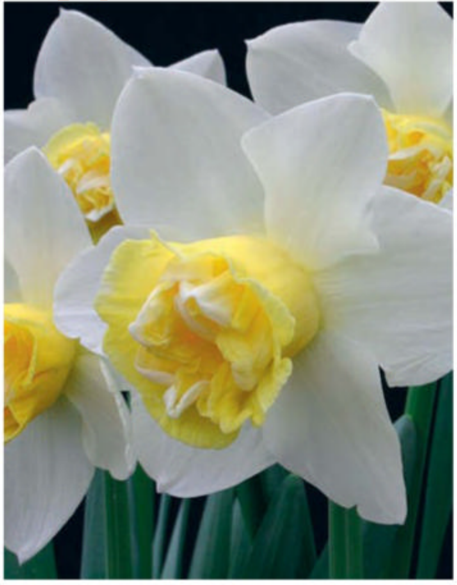
'Tricollet'



© Taylors bulbs

This is one of the controversial Division 11 Split Corona daffodils. Purists remain unconvinced by the spilt cups of this group, but I love them! This one shows off its orange botanical fan blades, flat against the white petal backdrop.

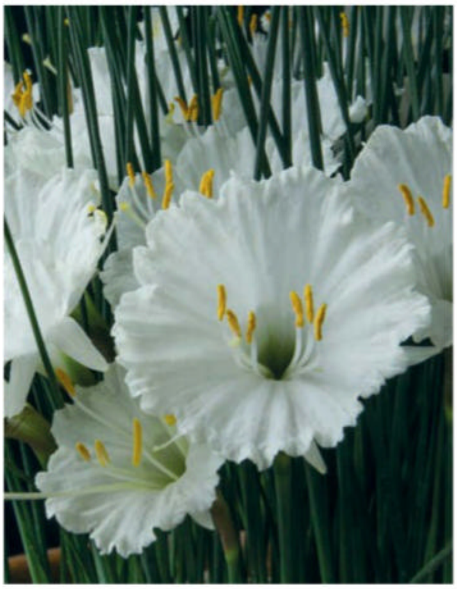
'Popeye'



© Carlos van der Veek Fluwel

A cup full of frills, but unlike its cartoon character namesake, needs no extra sustenance to give it power! A large specimen which will add impact to any pot or border.

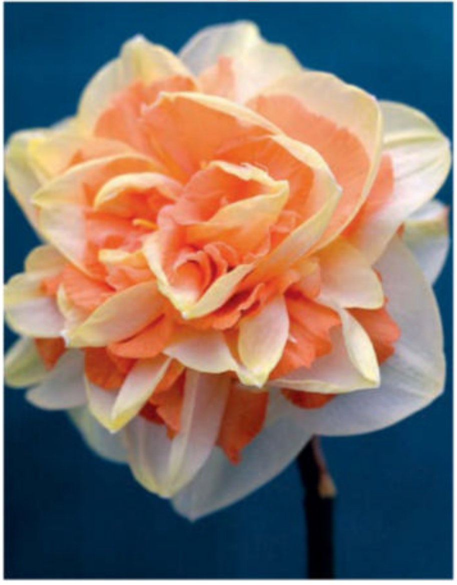
'Albiorix'



© Anne Wright Dryad Nursery

These shaped daffodils are known as 'hoop petticoats' and it's not hard to see why. This all-white example has a wonderful wide skirt and fragrance to boot, with bright golden stamens protruding like little ballet slipper-clad feet! Best placed in a terracotta pan where you can really show it off.

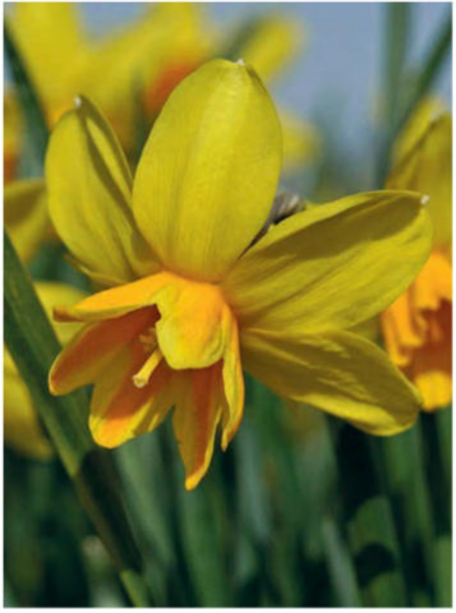
'Peach Schnapps'



© Esker Farm Daffodils

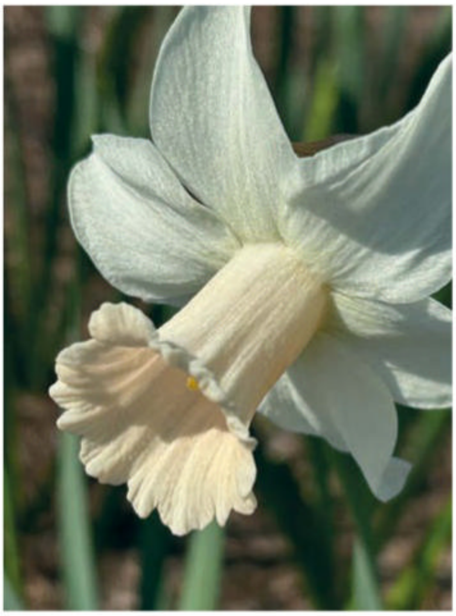
A strong double bloom, full and fancy. A show bench stunner which is truly intoxicating.

‘Rataplan’


© Carlos van der Veek Fluwel

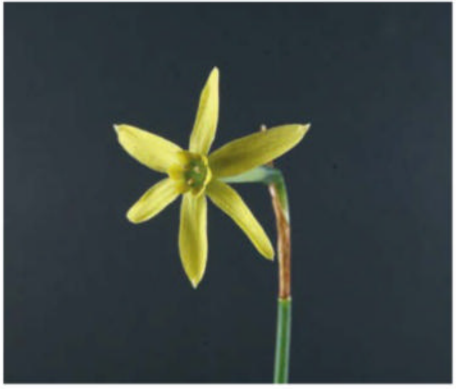
Undeniably unique, yet a close relative of one of our most widely grown garden daffodils, ‘Jetfire’. The wide crown-like trumpet splits into six well-separated oblong orange lobes, edged in gold to match its supporting petals. Reliably robust and like no other!

‘Lilac Charm’


© Camilla Bassett-Smith

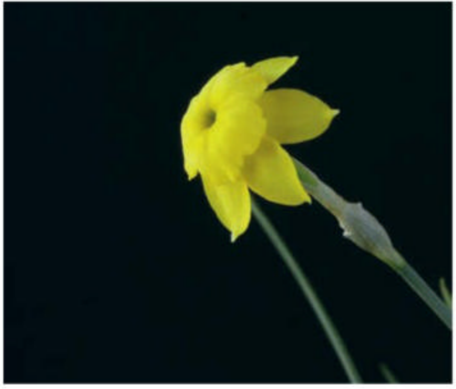
A postcard of this little beauty adorned my wall in the 1990s, a botanical sandwich in between Kylie and Jason! Currently part of a two-year Cyclamineus Division 6 trial at RHS Wisley, which is looking at over 30 of these reflexed-petalled cultivars. The blooms have a slight iridescence which shimmers in the sunshine.

‘Verdant Sparks’


© Esker Farm Daffodils

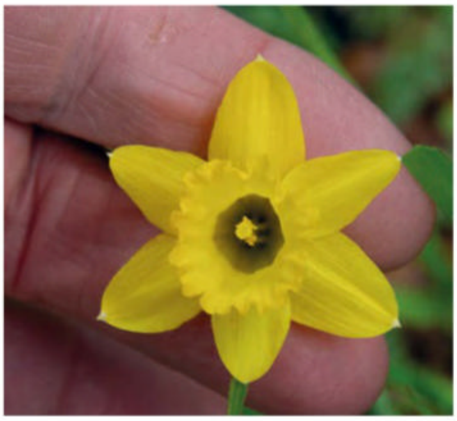
With its greeny-yellow tones, this is one of over 100 registered autumn-flowering narcissus, so plant some and really confuse your neighbours.

‘Re-entry’


© Anne Wright Dryad Nursery

Definitely from outer space (well, actually from Anne Wright at Dryad Nursery who knows a thing or two about star quality daffodils!). Burning brightly like a comet and leaving a pleasing perfume in its wake, this is a charismatic curiosity!

‘Micro Miniatures’


© Graham Fleming

Bred in Australia by Keira bulbs, these tiny tots are new and super exciting! Early flowerers, alpine growers will be salivating with anticipation.

▶

Daffodil care tips

Hey, good looking

A healthy daffodil bulb is firm and dry, dressed in its papery brown tunic.

The secret to storage

Keep bulbs in a cool, well-ventilated area until planting – a cellar, shed or garage is ideal. Keep away from any damp spots as this can encourage the spread of disease.

How low to go

A good rule of thumb is to plant your beauties three times as deep as the height of the bulb. If you can go a little lower, this will do no harm and is preferable to planting too near to the soil surface. That said, daffodils are pretty resilient, illustrated by the countless examples thriving alongside hedgerows in Cornwall after being discarded when fields were turned over to edible crop production during the Second World War.

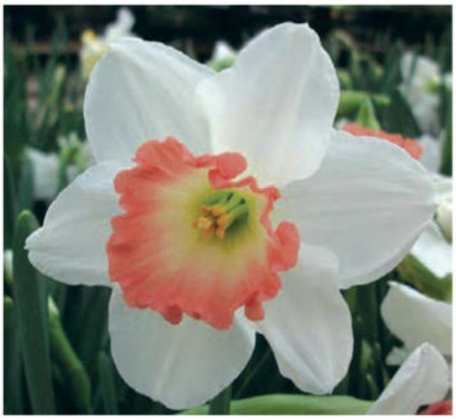
Pot perfection

Daffodils perform well in pots where you can plant them closer together than in the ground. Use a free-draining peat free compost or bulb compost and top dress with grit. Ensure the pot has drainage holes, and I recommend planting the bulbs in the ground the following year.

© Shutterstock

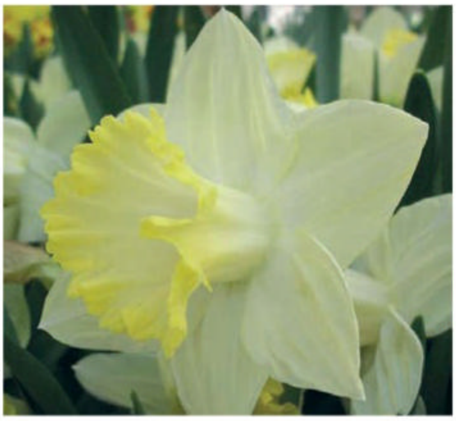
Above: Camilla explains how to plant daffodil bulbs

'Pink Charm'


© Taylors Bulbs

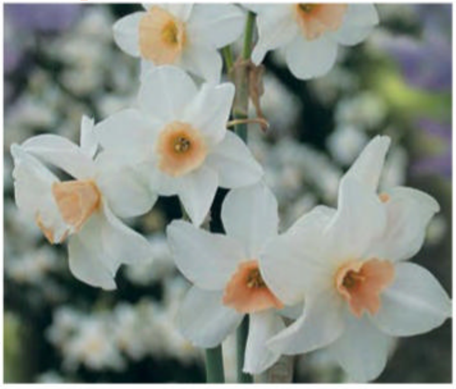
If you want a strong pink cup, then this is it. A good-sized daffodil which also lasts well as a cut flower.

'Pistachio'


© Taylors Bulbs

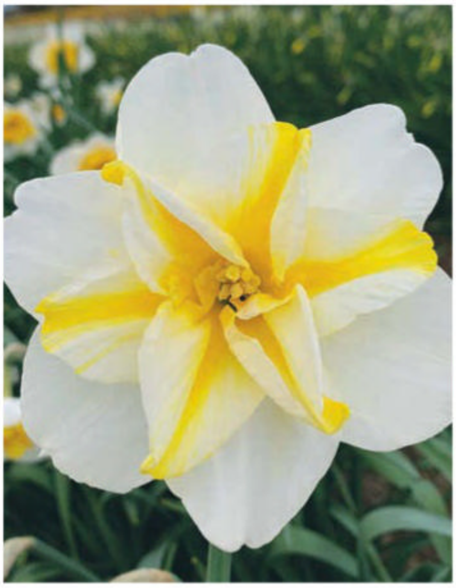
Nuttily narcotic, the petals and cup could inspire the latest Farrow and Ball paint in a sort of weathered cream, while the cup has been dipped in bright yellow gloss to complete the look.

'Baby Doll'


© Taylors Bulbs

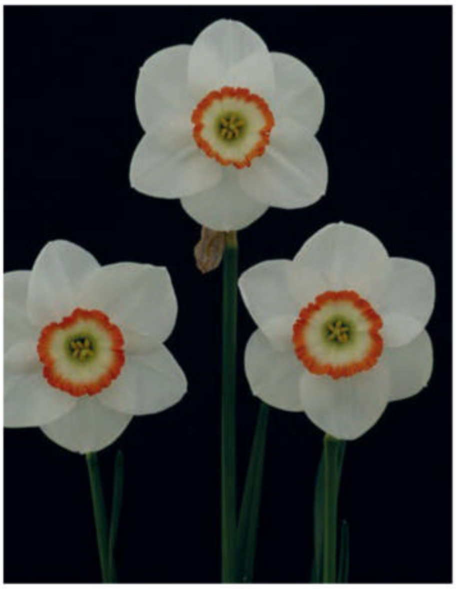
Belonging to the Jonquil group, the scent here is sweet as can be. Add this to the subtle pinky-peach cups and multiple blooms per stem, this really is a 'living doll' of which Cliff Richard would be proud!

'Sunset Serenade'


© Taylors Bulbs

A delicious bulbous affair, like an ice-cream drizzled atop with rich butterscotch sauce. The stripes are very pronounced and ensure an encore-worthy serenade.

'Camilla Clara Kate'


© Michael Baxter

With a strong, red-rimmed cup with buttercream centre, this one was excitingly named after me by one of the world's leading breeders, Brian Duncan of Northern Ireland. Thankfully wrinkle-free and long-lasting (both 'Camilla Clara Kate' and Brian!), she makes her Malvern Autumn Show debut this month, with Pheasant Acre Nursery adding the bulbs to their sales stock at the event. I'd love to have a place in your gardens, so do add me to your shopping list!

© Camilla Bassett-Smith/ Taylors bulbs

Q&A

Q Will mice or squirrels eat my bulbs?
A Daffodils contain unappealing toxins such as Galantamine which these creatures will not be wanting for a take-away, so worry not. However, Galantamine is very sought after elsewhere, being extracted for use in Alzheimer's treatment and also fed to cattle in an attempt to decrease methane emissions.

Q Should I plant daffodils in sun or shade?
A Daffodils prefer a sunny site, but will still perform well with partial shade. A few such as 'Jenny' and 'Thalia' are a little more shade tolerant. Remember when planting that your daffodil flowers will face the sun, so bear this in mind when planning your displays.

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Esker Farm Daffodils
www.eskerfarmdaffodils.com

Dryad Nursery
www.dryad-home.co.uk

Fluwel *www.fluwel.com*

Television horticulturist Camilla Bassett-Smith is a member of the RHS Bulb Expert Group and Editor of *The Daffodil Society* magazine. She is chairing a two-year trial on Division 6 daffodils at RHS Wisley and can be seen regularly on ITV's '*Love Your Weekend*').

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Mike reveals his pick of the best trees for planters

8 terrific trees for tiny spaces

Mike Palmer shares his favourite small trees for making a big impact on bijou balconies and within compact gardens

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

> *"The trees in my garden are more than decoration; they are company"*
> *Garden writer and author, Anna Pavord*

When we bought this house and garden almost eight years ago, we decided to do the whole move ourselves, in my natty blue gardening van. Without doubt, the hardest part of the move was the garden, with too many large containers housing small trees. They just had to come to the new garden, because as garden writer Anna Pavord has said, they were our outside 'companions'.

I'm often asked by gardeners with smaller gardens what they can plant to guarantee impact, structure and seasonal interest. "A beautiful tree," I'll suggest, and some will recoil in horror, with the familiar cry of "Oh! It's only a small garden," to which I'll very respectfully counter, "That's definitely not a problem; let's look at the options."

And indeed, there are many options for wonderful smaller trees that offer more than one season of interest. From balconies to small, perfectly appointed bijou gardens, there's a tree waiting for you.

Why trees are so important

Trees are one of Mother Nature's gifts to all of us, providing structure, shelter, shade and sustenance (that's all of the 'S' words covered), not forgetting seasonal drama, colour and form.

Then there's the important roles of carbon capture, biodiversity, oxygen production, air cleansing and water management. Trees have a mightily significant role to play in the maintenance of our world now and for the future.

Mike's 8 tree choices for a smaller garden or balcony

Cercis canadensis Eternal Flame ('Nc2016-2')

This redbud tree works hard in my garden. From April to May, tiny clusters of rosy-pink, pea-like flowers huddle around bare stems, announcing the imminent arrival of a proliferation of heart-shaped leaves that emerge ruby-red before fading to a kaleidoscope of umber, orange, lime-green and yellow. It has great autumn colour too.

© Shutterstock

Dicksonia antarctica (Tree fern)

Slow-growing tree ferns add instant impact and drama to a garden and are perfect container or border specimens. Their rough, corrugated trunks and eye-catching fronds are perfect for a shady nook and are available in various heights. Hardy to around -5C (41F) they need protection over winter.

© Shutterstock

Malus 'John Downie'

I adore this crab apple which blossoms white from pink buds in spring, with late-summer trusses of eye-catching, rosy-orange and green pear-shaped fruit that turn scarlet as the season fades.

It's great for crab apple jelly, with stilton! Can be grown in a very large container, but I would prefer to plant this beauty in a border. (H&S: 4m to 6m/13ft to 20ft).

Cornus kousa var. *chinensis* 'China Girl'

David Bowie sang 'I'm a mess without my little China girl' and I'd certainly miss my *Cornus* 'China Girl', or dogwood, as she puts on a spectacular show from spring with the emergence of small, wavy-edged foliage which acts as the perfect foil for a constellation of creamy bracts, which turn white as they age, surrounding tiny flowers.

The bracts will fall, eventually, and the mature specimens of the flowers form tiny rounded green fruits that turn red. Whether in a border or a large container it's totally gorgeous! (H&S: 6m x 5m/20ft x 16.5ft).

© Shutterstock

Cotinus 'Grace'

As its name suggests, grace is personified within this large shrub, or small tree. I grow its cousin, *C.coggygria* 'Royal Purple' in my border, and have raised its canopy through pruning to resemble a tree.

C. 'Grace' is clothed in large, oval purple-tinged foliage that turns fiery red in late summer with delicate plumes of 'smoke-like' flowers in shades of purple-pink.

Cotinus will tolerate hard pruning in late winter before new growth appears which will restrict size. A large container or border beauty. (H&S: 4 x 4m/13ft x 13ft).

© Shutterstock

Cercidiphyllum japonicum 'Boyd's Dwarf'

This is great news for candy floss lovers! Do you long for the scent but none of the calories? Then you're in luck. *Cercidiphyllum* 'Boyd's Dwarf' is a compact, slow growing katsura tree, with small, heart-shaped leaves, bronze-tinged when emerging, turning autumnal shades of yellow and orange, and pink before falling, with a delightfully aromatic waft of candy floss. Ideal in a large container or planted in a border. (H&S: 3m x 2m/10ft x 6.5ft).

And finally... apple and pear trees

If picking your own apples or pears is a dream for your smaller garden or patio, then read on. The eventual height and spread of fruit trees can be restricted by what is known as a dwarfing rootstock.

For apples, look for M27 growing to around 2m (6.6ft), or M9 rootstocks, growing to around 3m (9.8ft). For pears, Quince C is the best option, at approximately 3m (9.8ft).

Popular apple varieties include *Malus* 'Sunset' and for pears, try *Pyrus communis* 'Concorde'.

© Shutterstock

Growing trees in containers

In smaller gardens and on balconies, trees should work hard to earn their keep and fulfil key requirements. They should wow and thrill us across the seasons, be productive, perhaps with juicy apples or pears, or sit obligingly in a large container without sulking. They should make us pretty proud that we chose them to live alongside us in our green space.

Yet, we don't want to grow plants which won't have enough room to grow, or which might easily dominate, or indeed take over our gardens. So understanding the size and spread of the tree is crucial to avoid copious amounts of taming with secateurs and pruning saw in hand.

Above: Trees grown in planters will require more watering so the bigger the planter the better and mulching can help protect the soil from drying out so quickly

Mike's essential checklist

- Choose a generous container, at least 50 x 50cm (20 x 20in).
- Use a loam-based compost with added horticultural grit for drainage. Refresh the top 8cm to 10cm (3in to 4in) of compost in spring (this is called top-dressing).
- Keep trees fed and watered, especially in summer.
- Re-pot every three to four years if necessary.
- Insulate pots in winter with bubble wrap or hessian to protect roots from freezing temperatures.

Mike explains how to care for small space trees such as the potted crab apple pictured

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THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

Planning an orchard, sowing winter salads and helping beans through times of drought

Anne explains how she is keeping her garden fruitful as we move into the autumn months

It has been a bumper year for Anne's old apple trees. Lift and gently twist the apples and when ready they'll come away with their stalks attached

Cooler nights, bright shiny conkers, dewy spider webs, and gardens lit by low shafts of sunlight mark the gradual transition of summer to autumn.

Hopefully soils have now moistened after summer's drought, so that clearing and mulching veg beds and between fruit bushes and perennial veg can start. Worms will then pull fibrous, well-rotted matter down, improving texture, encouraging microbial activity and adding nutrients.

This is an in-between time for seed sowing, as most autumn and winter crops are already growing and late-sown sweet peas, peas and broad beans are not started until October or November. What we can do is root through seed tins for packets of quick-growing leafy veg to sow closely, little and often, to deliver cut-and-come-again salads. This is a great way of using up open packets and seeds past their sell-by dates.

Pruning our orchard apple trees is a job I never seem to complete and the beautiful old trees have settled into a habit of biennial bearing. One year we struggle to harvest enough and the next, they are laden. By contrast, the three mature upright cordons ('James Grieve', 'Red Devil' and 'Fiesta') in the kitchen garden are treated to a thorough summer pruning every year and deliver a more reliable crop. This year is one of plenty and we're enjoying its fruitfulness.

As I write, our garden is the driest it has been during our 27 years of occupation. We've had no appreciable rain since around March and although crops have been irrigated, many shrubs and herbaceous perennials are wilting badly. England has experienced one of the driest springs on record, followed by the warmest summer (the driest was in 1995 and second driest in 1976). Our best crops have been chard, beetroot, potatoes and green beans.

How to grow… Apple trees

Anyone thinking of adding a small tree or two to the garden would do well to consider apples. They are wreathed with spring blossom and attract many insects and, therefore, birds. Abundant apples are great for cooking, so think back to all those fabulous apple puddings our mums and grans used to make; crumbles, Charlottes, pies, Eve's pudding, apple snow and Dorset apple cake.

The branches of mature trees are also perfect for children to climb or for suspending hammocks.

Now's the time to plan where trees might go and which varieties to choose. Autumnal apple festivals and tasting events provide an opportunity to pick out favourites and are great places to meet local growers and learn about regional varieties that suit your soil and climate.

The size of your apple tree will be governed by the rootstock onto which the chosen cultivar is grafted and nurseries will help with that. The different cultivars flower at varying times, with fruits ripening in early, mid or late season. Most are not self-fertile and rely on another variety flowering nearby for pollination.

Anne's later apple variety 'Ashmead's Kernel' is still firmly attached to the tree and so will be picked later

Where space is tight, you can enjoy several cultivars by training them as step-over, cordon or espalier forms and choosing a succession to ripen from August through to November. The late-maturing sorts usually store well and their fruits change in taste and texture with keeping.

Clear a space for your apple tree or trees, condition the soil and order them for delivery bare-rooted when dormant. Some (cordons for instance) will need staking, so buy the stakes, tree ties and protective measures for rabbit or deer if necessary so there will be no delay in planting.

All images unless otherwise credited: John Swithinbank

Try these... Delicious varieties of apples

© www.fruit-trees.com

'Beauty of Bath'
An attractive and delicious early maturing apple whose flesh is often stained red. Flesh is sweet, crisp and juicy but ready in August. They don't keep.

© www.walcotnursery.co.uk

'Laxton's Fortune'
A popular mid-season dessert apple with a sweet flavour similar to 'Cox's Orange Pippin'. Eat from September into October. Apples will keep a short while.

© www.thompson-morgan.com

'Jonagold'
Large, dual-purpose apples flushed and striped with red are crisp and juicy with a rich, sweet aromatic flavour. Picked in early October, the fruits will store through to March. A triploid variety, it needs two pollinating trees.

How to grow cut-and-come-again crops

Anne explains how to grow lots of lovely windowsill leaves for regular pickings

© Shutterstock

My seed tins delivered a surprising wealth of cut-and-come-again (CCA) candidates such as kale, Chinese cabbage, salad rocket, mixed leaves, spinach, mizuna, chard, sorrel and pak choi. These were divided into three groups, so that each would deliver a good mixture of colour, texture and tangy flavour.

Then came the pleasurable job of creating three signature blends by mixing the seeds, while enjoying their variable shapes and shades. Sowing for CCA is ripe for experimentation, by choosing containers of varying depths and playing with the densities of seeds. Re-use plastic chocolate assortment containers and mushroom punnets with holes made in the base, sections of guttering, seed trays or wide, shallow pots.

Mine varied from barely 5cm (2.5in) deep to about 10cm (4in) and filled with peat-free multipurpose compost (I used one containing a little loam and some extra grit), the life of the salads will vary with depth of roots. For old seeds, a denser sowing makes sense in case they don't all germinate.

Lettuce seeds are inhibited from germination at temperatures above 21C (70F), so late-summer sowings may need a cool, shady spot. Now, they are better under cover protected from rain. Harvest leaves with scissors, cutting above the growth point so the plants will sprout again.

At this point a liquid feed will help them find the energy to push up more leaves for second or even third cuts. I've sown five containers and will try to repeat weekly, making adjustments as I go along.

Step by step Seed sowing for lovely leaves

1 A great way of using up old and leftover seeds of leafy crops is to create your own cut-and-come-again mixtures

2 Experimenting is fun, so fill a variety of containers with good multipurpose compost and sow across the top

3 Cover the seeds lightly with a scattering of compost before watering in using a fine rose on the can

Dealing with drought on beans and potatoes

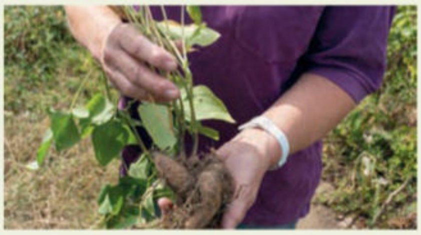
While established ornamentals and the lawn were left to fend for themselves, I did irrigate some of our crops during the long spring-to-autumn drought.

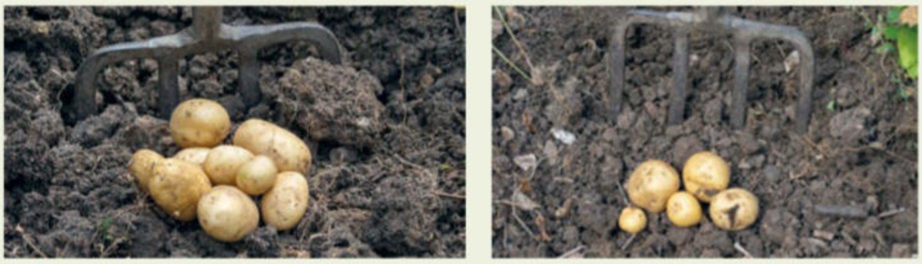
Runner beans loved the heat and we picked bags full from two sowings, finishing at the end of August. I risked a late third sowing into pots and modules of 'Benchmaster' in July which, when planted out, were halfway up their poles and setting flower buds by the end of August. As the nights grew colder, watering took place only in the mornings, as temperatures rose.

Although we treat runner beans as annuals, they are perennial and there was a surprise extra crop from last year's beans left in. Yet they are never as prolific or good as from fresh sowings.

As potatoes are such a thirsty crop, watering them seemed a step too far. The earlier they were planted, the better they did, even though the trenches were soaked before planting the final bag of 'Jazzy'.

Above: Anne's July sowing of runner bean 'Benchmaster' has swarmed up its poles and was setting flowers by the end of August


Above: Dig up an old runner bean plant and you'll be surprised to see they have thick, woody almost tuberous roots. After a mild winter, they'll sprout again


Above: Potatoes are very water-hungry crops so with little watering Anne's favourite second early 'Nadine' (left) yielded only a few small but very tasty potatoes, while planted later into even drier soil one haulm of 'Jazzy' (right) delivered even fewer spuds

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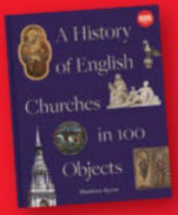

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AG-Sept25

7 of the best ground cover plants for autumn

Liz Zorab offers her pick of the low-growing lovelies that combine beauty with soil protection

Mulching with a layer of organic matter does a great job in protecting soil from the elements and adding nutrients at this time of year. Ground cover planting can also work well as the roots of plants hold soil in place better than an extra layer of mulch. Also, the continuous activity between plant roots and the microbiome further adds to the long-term stability and health of the soil.

You could use green manure as ground cover of course. Sow the seeds and then chop back the growth and either leave it on the soil or dig it into the first few centimetres. But in my mind, that's a lot of work, takes time for plants to grow and it has the potential to disturb the soil more than necessary. Whereas permanent ground cover plants provide attractive and beneficial protection during autumn and beyond.

Cyclamen hederifolium

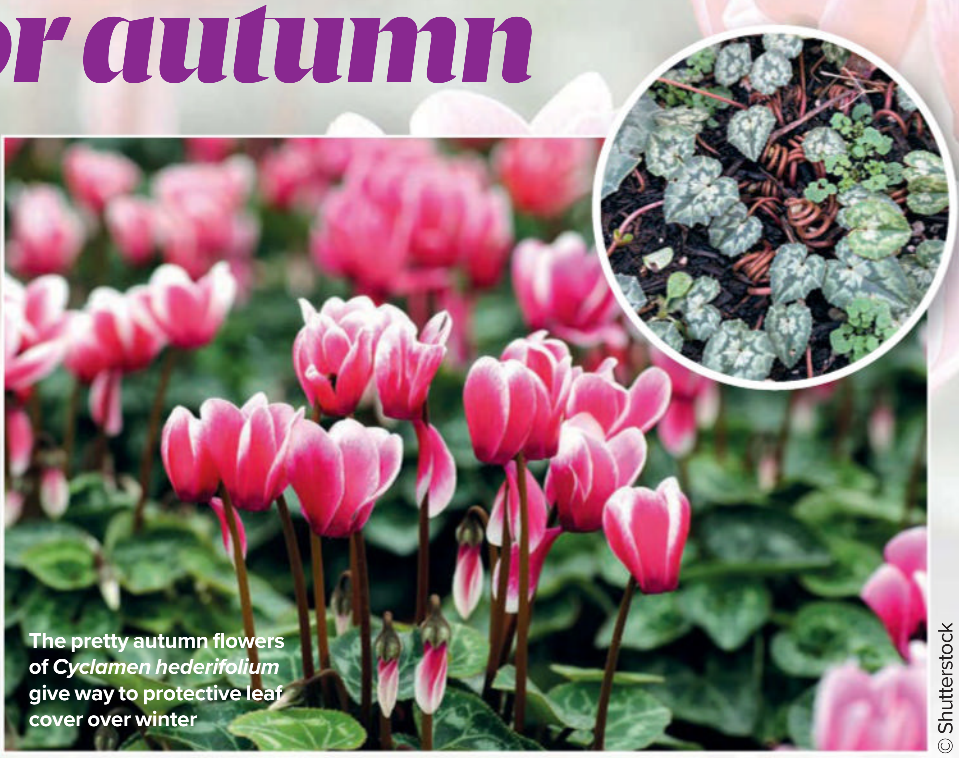
Ivy-leaved cyclamen plants produce flowers in late summer and autumn before their leaves are left to stay firm during the colder months. The flowers are usually pink, but I've seen white-flowered examples too.

The leaves have an ivy shape and are patterned with silver and green. They provide ground cover in autumn and through the winter. As the flowers produce seeds, the flower stems curl into a tight spring, adding even more interest.

Grow in any type of well-drained soil, in a sheltered position, preferably in partial shade. Hardy in most places in the UK and Ireland, I grow cyclamen between and beneath summer-flowering herbaceous perennials.

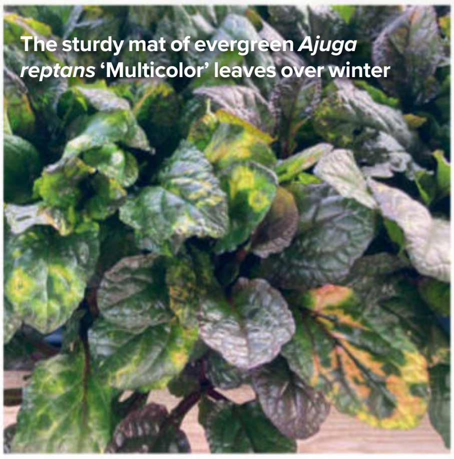
Ajuga reptans 'Multicolor'

Often found in garden centres labelled as Rainbow or Tricolour, this plant forms a

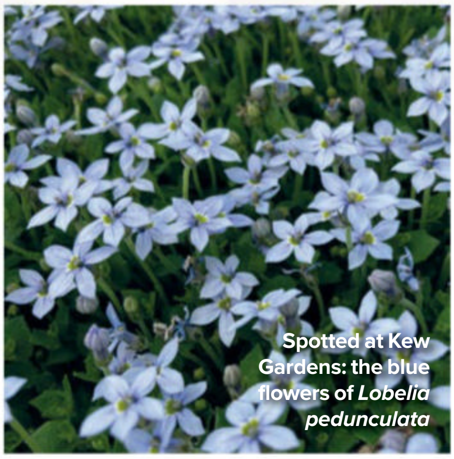


The pretty autumn flowers of *Cyclamen hederifolium* give way to protective leaf cover over winter

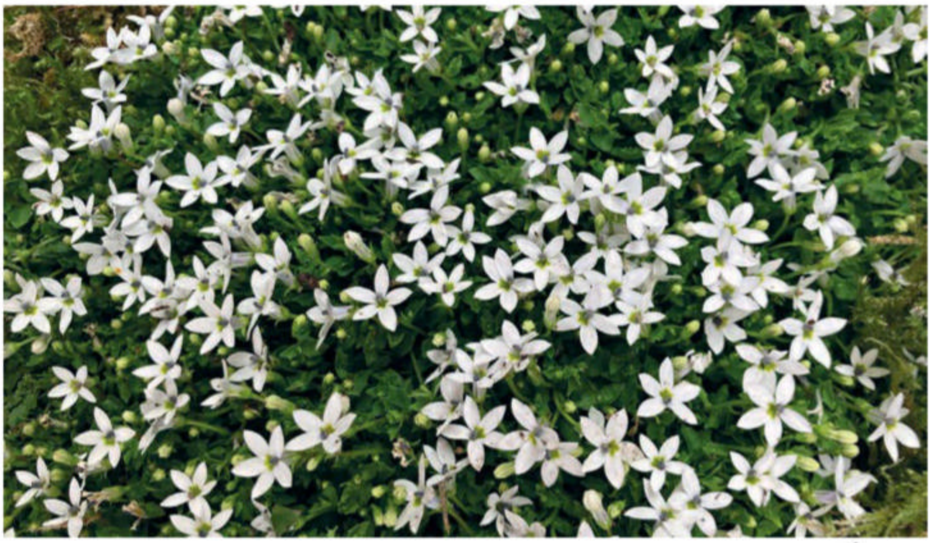
© Shutterstock



The sturdy mat of evergreen *Ajuga reptans* 'Multicolor' leaves over winter

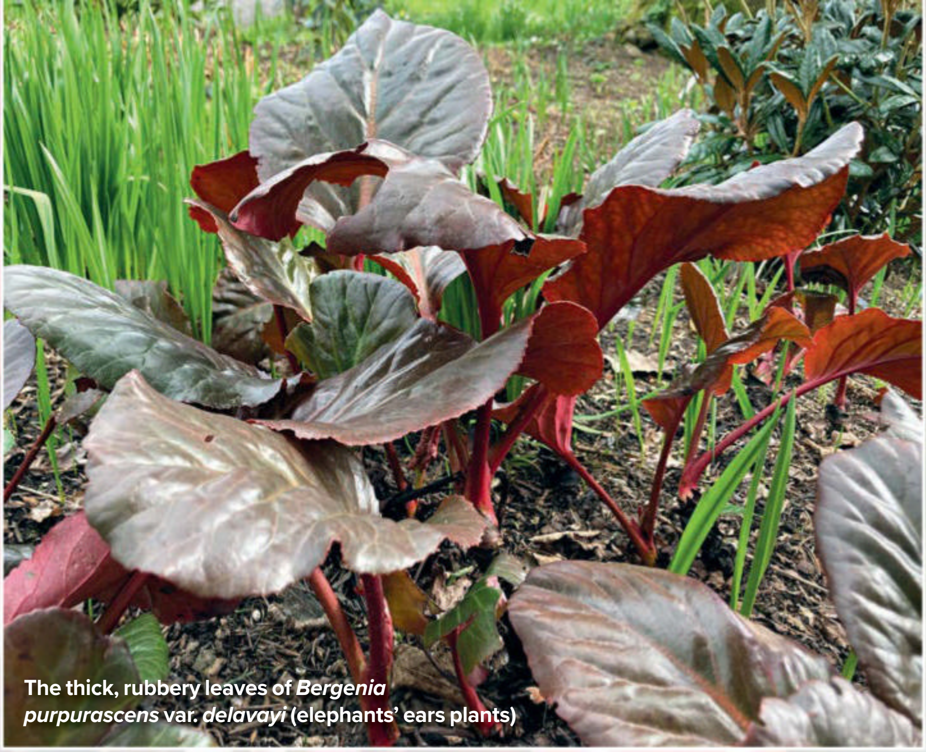


Spotted at Kew Gardens: the blue flowers of *Lobelia pedunculata*



A white variety of *Lobelia pedunculata* at The Royal Welsh Show

All images unless otherwise credited: Liz Zorab



The thick, rubbery leaves of *Bergenia purpurascens* var. *delavayi* (elephants' ears plants)

dense mat of bronze-green leaves that are streaked, splashed or spotted with cream and pink.

It is an evergreen, so will continue to provide cover and colour throughout the year. Dark blue flowers are produced in late spring and early summer.

Ajuga is a ground-hugging plant that reaches 8cm to 15 cm (3in to 6in) height and up to 60cm (2ft) spread. Grow in loam or clay soil that is moist, but well-drained. It is happiest in partial shade or full shade, in any aspect except a south-facing site. Hardy across the UK, Ireland and Europe, it may naturalise given the right conditions.

Lobelia pedunculata

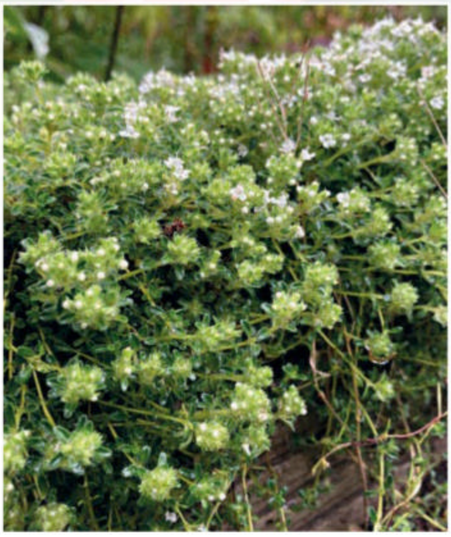
I saw this blue flower at Kew Gardens, where it had formed a large carpet of colour across the ground.

Also known as *Pratia pendunculata*, it grows to 2cm to 4cm (1in to 1.5in) tall and 150cm (59in) spread. It forms an evergreen mat of small leaves above which the small flowers appear in summer. Because it is such a vigorous plant, there is a potential for it to become a bit of a nuisance.

It is hardy throughout most of the UK and prefers a sheltered site in shade or partial shade, although the plants I saw at Kew had little shade and were thriving. The white variant is just as lovely; I spotted this one at the Royal Welsh Show in July.

Bergenia purpurascens var. *delavayi*

For many years, I didn't like what we called elephants' ears plants, and they seemed to be in every suburban garden in the corner of Gloucestershire where I grew up. However, having seen them providing ground cover in shrubberies and on the edges of woodland gardens, I now understand their appeal.



Above: A dense matt of evergreen foliage and tiny white blooms of white-flowered creeping thyme

The thick, rubbery leaves are dark green to bronzy-purple, which often intensifies as the temperatures drop, as long as there are good light levels. They have a slightly erect habit to 40cm (15.7in) height and will form a ground-covering clump up to 50cm (20in) spread or more. Clusters of white or pink flowers appear on erect stems in spring.

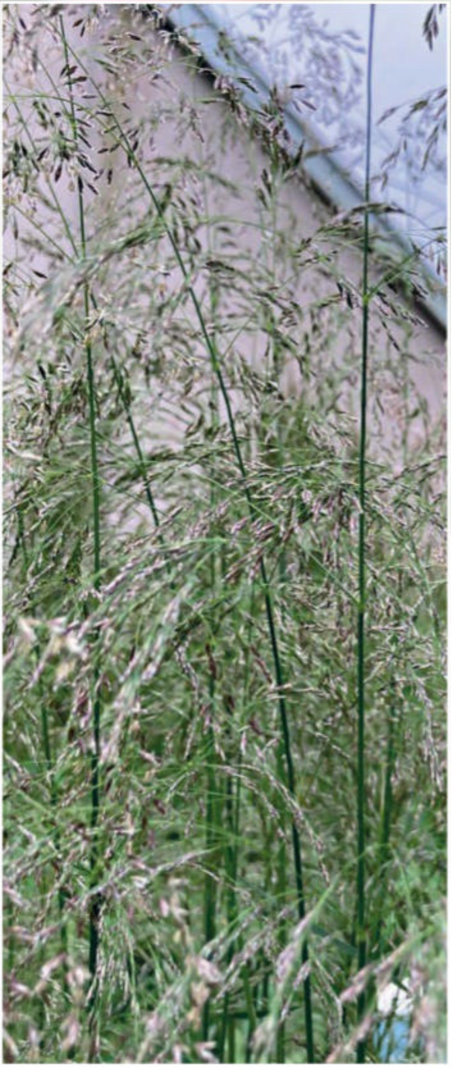
Grow in full sun or partial shade. They prefer loamy, moist, but well-drained soil. They may fail to thrive in clay and chalk soils.

Thymus serpyllum var. *albus*

White-flowered creeping thyme forms a dense mat of evergreen foliage that hugs the ground and often roots into it where the stems touch the soil, anchoring it firmly in place. It grows to around 4cm (1.5in) height and 40cm to 60cm (15.7in to 24in) spread.

The dark green leaves are aromatic and during summer it produces clusters of tiny, white flowers. Grow in alkaline or neutral chalk, loam or sandy soil that is well-drained. Position in full sun.

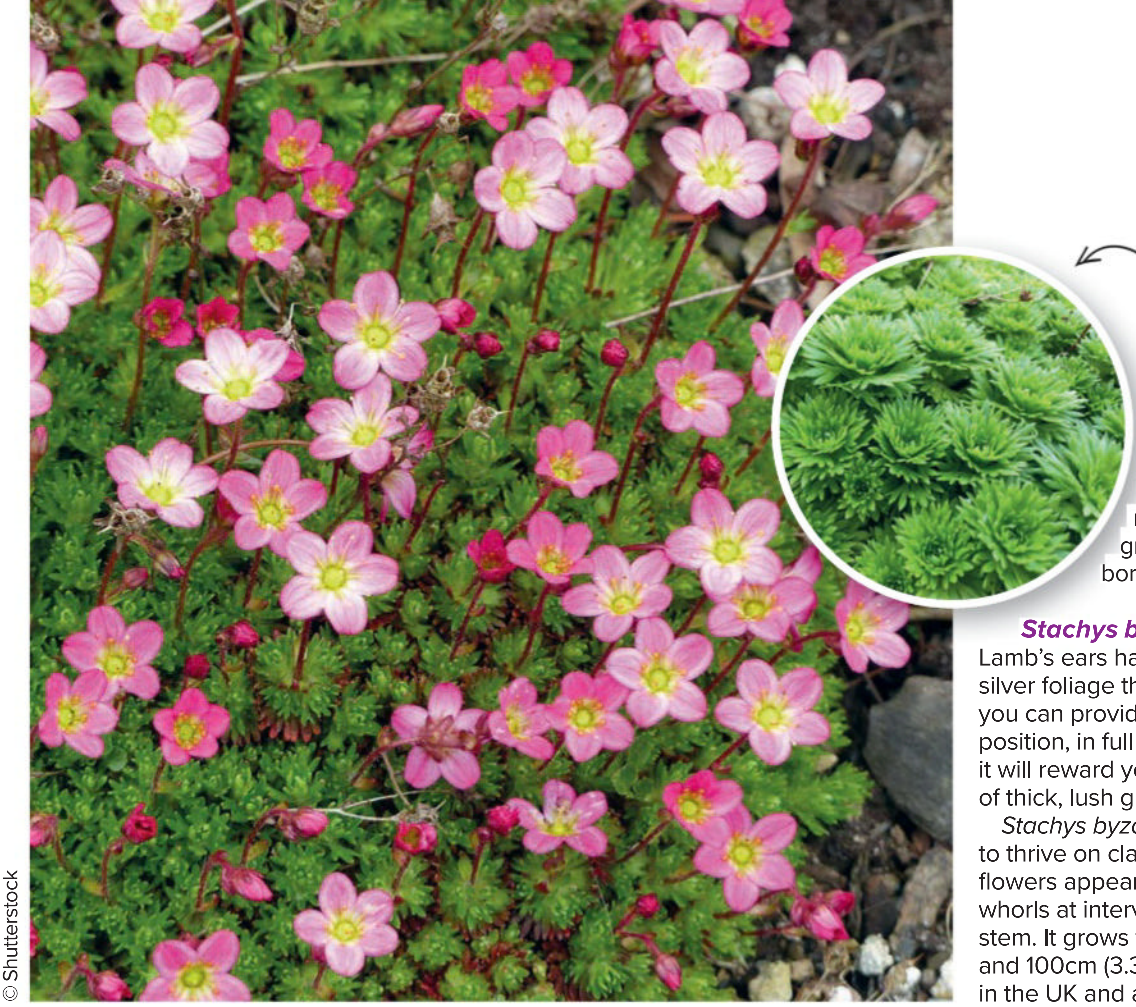
It is hardy throughout most of the UK and Ireland, although it may not survive a severe winter.



Above: Tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldschleier') provides winter interest and ground protection

Deschampsia cespitosa 'Goldschleier'

Ornamental grasses are ideal for use as ground cover and their seed heads can provide added interest throughout autumn and winter. *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldschleier' is a perennial evergreen that has fine arching blue-green leaves. From late spring or early summer it produces flower stems with golden-coloured flowers that have a silvery sheen. I tend to leave the flowering stems, but you can cut them down in late spring. Height 90cm (3ft) and 60cm (2ft) spread.



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The lovely spring/early summer flowers of *Saxifraga* x *arendsii* provide attractive autumn leaves

and 30cm (12in) spread, making them ideal for growing at the front of the border.

Stachys byzantina 'Silver Carpet'

Lamb's ears have distinctive, evergreen, silver foliage that is soft and downy. If you can provide a south or west-facing position, in full sun and well-drained soil, it will reward you with a spreading carpet of thick, lush growth.

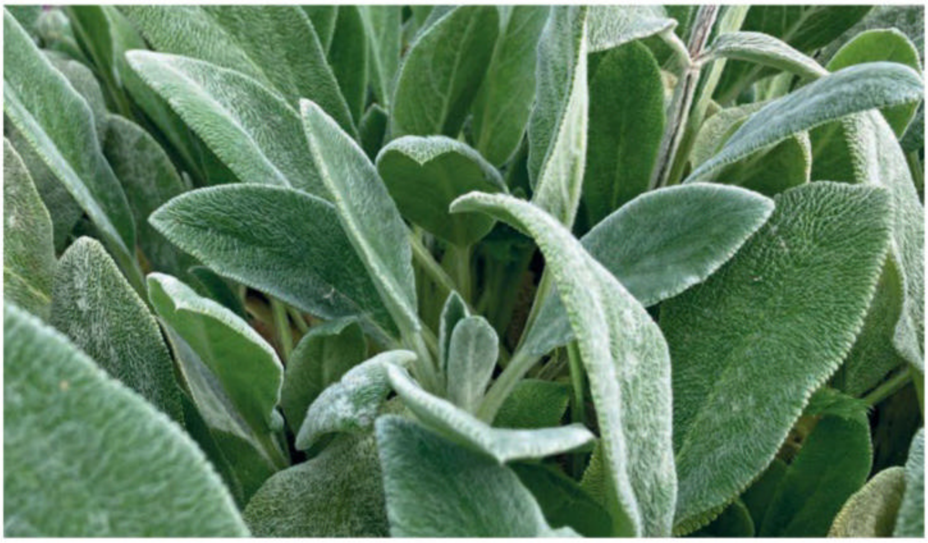
Stachys byzantina is likely to fail to thrive on clay soils. Pink or mauve flowers appear in summer, growing in whorls at intervals around the flower stem. It grows to 50cm (19.6in) height and 100cm (3.3ft) spread. It is fully hardy in the UK and across most of Europe.

Saxifraga x arendsii

This low-growing plant forms a dense mat of leaves and produces masses of very small flowers in late spring and early summer. Flower colour depends on variety, but they are usually red, pink or white.

However, I think it comes into its own in autumn because the small rosettes of leaves stay a fresh green colour, while much around it is starting to die back. It requires neutral to alkaline soil that is well-draining and will fail to thrive on heavy or clay soils. Grow in full sun or partial shade in a west or south-facing, sheltered spot.

Hardy throughout the UK and Ireland, even in severe winters, and easy to propagate by removing individual rosettes and rooting them. Height 15cm (6in)



Above: Soft, downy foliage of Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina* 'Silver Carpet') provide a mat of foliage

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Rosie's retro revival

New series

Enjoy a kaleidoscope of colours with lupins

Why it's time to give lupins some love

Rosie Irving explains why these cottage garden legends deserve a starring role again

> *'Where lupins grow, the past meets the day, a quiet beauty that will not fade away...'*
>
> *Source unknown*

Once a defining feature of classic cottage gardens, lupins, with their colourfully dramatic, pollinator-friendly flower spires, are now waiting in the wings, ready to reclaim the spotlight.

These stunning plants are perfect for the gardener looking for a touch of heritage combined with modern appeal.

Although there are several hundred different species of lupins, mainly originating from North and South America, the majority of the perennial hybrids grown in our gardens today are derived from the big-leaved, blue-flowered species, *Lupinus polyphyllus*.

Early Egyptians ate the seeds and the Romans grew lupins to improve poor soils as the plants are members of the pea family *Fabaceae*, known for fixing nitrogen

Wild flowering lupins have led to many of the perennial hybrid varieties we are familiar with today

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Lupins work well in cottage garden-style planting

in the soil via nodules on the plants' roots.

The blue/purple, willowy flower spires of lupins found their way into British cottage gardens in the early 1800s but their murky colours and flopping flowers failed to make an impression on the British gardening community until the 1930s.

We have a modest, but determined, man to thank for single-handedly revolutionising the structure and colour of the humble lupin, transforming them into the vibrant, firework-coloured gems now freely available.

That man was George Russell, a humble gardener from York who, through his dogged determination, became one of the great plant breeders of the 20th century.

His work was all the more remarkable in that he did it with no horticultural training over a period of 30 years, starting in the early 1900s.

His aim was to create brightly coloured, tightly packed, upright flower spikes and he was ruthless in his quest for the best, annually culling most of the 5,000 or so plants grown on his two allotments, leaving around just 200 plants with the characteristics he was looking for, saving their seed for sowing the following year. ▶

Did you know?

The seeds of some *Lupinus* species are edible and were once a traditional snack in South America. It's been said that they're set to become the next health craze due to their high levels of protein and soluble fibre.

The UK bred variety *L. albus* 'Dieta' is being marketed as bitter-free without needing any special pre-prep, but before you rush off to buy your edible lupin seeds, choose wisely as the verdict on the ones trialled on behalf of Garden Organic was that they were bland and tough textured.

Also, do not be tempted to try and eat the seeds of lupins not bred for eating. These would require extensive preparation to remove toxins before they could be eaten.

There is a shrubby form of lupin, known as the tree lupin, reaching heights of 2m (6ft).

Their flower spikes follow the sun throughout the day moving from east to west.

Above: We have determined gardener George Russell MBE to thank for the origins of the gorgeous, brightly-coloured array of hybrids we see today

Why they deserve to be revived

Above: Fashions come and go and more restful purples, blues and whites were all the rage for a time

During the height of 'Russell lupin-mania', his brightly coloured cultivars could be found growing in flower borders throughout the country, from stately homes to cottage gardens. However, to keep up with demand and replicate the original plants, huge amounts of cuttings had to be taken from just a few stock plants as seeds from them rarely came 'true to type'.

This constant plundering of the parent plants weakened them to such an extent that they all eventually succumbed to viral disease and thus the original Russell hybrids disappeared from the scene.

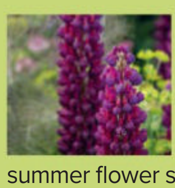
This coincided with the fashion changing from zingy, bright colours to restful blues, whites and shades of purple.

Amazingly, a new breed of nursery owners came along, taking seeds from descendants of the Russell hybrids and working their hybridising magic to once again offer those bright, jewel-like, upright spires, introducing them at a time when bright dahlias had once again become fashionable to grow later in the year.

In late spring and early summer the tall, bright flower spires of these new lupin hybrids add instant impact to a flower border. Bees adore them and their presence in the garden can instantly summon the romance and nostalgia of a traditional cottage garden border.

Above: Brighter coloured lupins are again available and work so well with other later flowering plants such as dahlias

5 of the best



'Masterpiece'
Currently one of the most popular hybrids often seen planted in early summer flower show exhibits and I totally understand why. From a practical point of view their wide foliage fills space and the crowning glory is their majestic flower spikes coloured a handsome deep purple with small flecks of orange at the base of each flower bud and, at 1m (39in) tall, are a medium size.

'Rachel de Thame'
90cm (3ft) tall and later flowering than most, this sweetly scented hybrid is named after the *Gardeners' World* presenter. Its pink and white bi-colour flowers were Mr Russell's favourite combination.

'Persian Slipper'
Another sweetly scented hybrid which has taken the classic original lupin colour of violet blue and added white flecks to each bud on 90cm (3ft) tall flower spikes. The unopened buds of the upper part of the flower spikes are white, making for a striking combination.

'Desert Sun'
I'm a big fan of soft yellows and this shorter hybrid fits the colour bill nicely, growing to 60cm (2ft), making this cultivar the perfect choice for smaller spaces or large containers.

The tree lupin, *Lupinus arboreus*
This is a tall (2m/6.5ft) sub-shrub with silvery-green leaves, producing highly scented yellow flowers throughout the summer that are beloved by butterflies and bees. It deserves to be more widely grown as it's fully hardy and keeps most of its leaves during mild winters if planted in a sheltered location.

This process is known today as line breeding.

Mr Russell ultimately triumphed. Not only did he manage to develop a rainbow of brightly coloured, solidly upright flower-stemmed lupins, but he also created bi-colour blooms with colours alternating all the way up the stems, a truly remarkable achievement.

He appears to have also been a very stubborn gentleman, consistently refusing to let anyone in the nursery trade have the right to grow and sell his hybrids for all of the 30 years he spent developing his colourful creations. Then, in 1935, nurseryman James Baker, (friend of David Austin senior), persuaded the ageing Mr Russell to let him market the hybrids on the strict understanding that Mr Russell would still have control over the plants.

So, in 1937, at the ripe old age of 80, Mr Russell finally allowed his hybrids to be displayed at a Royal Horticultural Society flower show where the brightly coloured flowers caused such a stir that crowds had to be re-directed to prevent a 'lupin crush'!

He was awarded an MBE for his Herculean efforts in breeding lupins, as well as one of the highest honours bestowed by the RHS, the Veitch Memorial Medal, for his outstanding contribution to horticulture.

Pests to watch out for

Slugs and snails have a liking for young lupin leaves and stems. Where possible, plant as mature plants and water in the morning rather than the evening. This gives the soil a chance to dry out before nightfall when slugs and snails are at their most active.

It may surprise you to learn that many slugs prefer to munch on dead or dying plant material, so consider practising 'chop and drop' where you leave healthy, dead flower stems and leaves on the border around the plants. I prefer to 'chop and drop neatly,' cutting the dead materials into smaller sections before dropping, to leave the flower border looking tidy whilst still being wildlife-friendly.

You can try the commonly touted methods of crushed egg shells, grit, wool and copper tape, but Royal Horticultural Society trials found them to be ineffective and I agree, having seen slugs and snails gliding over those various deterrents like graceful ice skaters, taking full advantage of the surface tension created by water droplets.

Large North American lupin aphids can look quite horrific gathered en masse on lupin flower stems. The easiest way to deal with them is to use a hose with full power, nozzle turned to thin spray. This will blast them off the stems without harming any beneficial insects.

Make the most of lupins

- Give plants a liquid seaweed feed as the leaves start to appear in spring and again during their growing period.

- Deadheading after flowering usually promotes a second flush of flowers in late summer, timed to perfectly co-ordinate with the joyful, early, autumn-flowering plants such as golden rod (*Solidago spp*) and asters (*Symphyotrichum spp*).

- Lift and divide lupins after about three to five years to rejuvenate and make more of your favourite plants.

- Always wear gloves when handling lupins as they are toxic to humans, and to pets.

Above: Rosie provides tips for growing more lupins

How to grow lupins

Lupins grow well in sunny borders and beds but will tolerate part shade

Roses work well alongside lupins. Rosie is pictured next to *Rosa* Roald Dahl ('Ausowlish')

© Rosie Irving

Where to grow them

Lupins thrive in an open, sunny spots with moist, well-drained soil, but will also tolerate part shade.

In large areas plant them in toning colour groups throughout the border.

In smaller gardens, dotting them in a rhythmic ribbon pattern along the border will draw the eye across in a very satisfactory manner.

Good planting companions

- The first plant that came to mind when writing this was roses, as their soft, blousy, rounded blooms are the perfect foil for the lupin's bold upright spires.

- Add early flowering hardy geraniums like 'Ann Folkard' to provide low, spreading mounds of interest.

- Medium-size grasses like *Pennisetum spp* also work well with lupins. Their arching, narrow stems highlight, without competing with, the bold, rigid, lupin flower stems.

Balance with some froth and arching foliage such as Bowman's root (*Gillenia trifoliata*) and you'll be the envy of visitors!

Above: Rosie recommends frothy Bowman's root (*Gillenia trifoliata*) as a good planting companion for lupins

Top tip for flowers

Lupin scent is far more noticeable when the flowers are brought indoors as cut stems. If doing this, removing all leaves and side shoots should stop the main flower spike drooping.

Deadhead before the whole flower spike has opened to achieve better and quicker repeat flowering. This is because the buds open from the bottom upwards, meaning that seed pods will be developing before the whole spire opens making it less likely to re-flower.

Above: Remove leaves and side shoots when picking for cut flowers. Do be aware all parts of the plant are poisonous to humans and pets, so position carefully

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Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Of cabbages and things!

We are now at the start of autumn, historically the one season devoid of home-grown cabbages. For hundreds of years we've been able to grow summer, winter and spring cabbages, but autumn cabbage varieties didn't really exist until a few decades ago. Now modern plant breeding has enabled us to grow cabbages all year round.

- Cabbages are from the *Cruciferae* plant family, which contains many plants – both edible and decorative. It is also known as the mustard family. The word *Cruciferae* comes from the Latin word for 'cross' – think of 'crucifix'. The name was applied to plants in this family because the flowers have four petals, arranged in the shape of a cross!

Cabbage timeline

- In the wild, cabbage species are native to the Mediterranean. Although not often connected to the Irish, it is believed that the Celts first brought cabbages to the British Isles in around 600BC.
- Since cabbage grows well in cool climates, yields large harvests, and stores well during winter, it soon became a major crop in northern Europe and Russia.
- Natural and early cabbage was loose-leaf in habit, rather like kale. Headed varieties were only developed during the Middle Ages, by north European farmers.

Wow! I didn't know that...

- Although they all look very different, cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts and kale are all the same species of plant – *Brassica oleracea*. The differences between them are the results of thousands of years of human cultivation and selective propagation.
- Cabbages require only three months of growing time, so a field of them over a year could yield more edible vegetables than any other crop.
- US baseball phenomenon Babe Ruth always wore a cabbage leaf under his hat during games. Half way through each game he would nip out for a fresh leaf.

This fortnight in gardening history

19 Sept 1925 Francis Darwin, English botanist and the third son of Charles Darwin, died at the age of 77. In 1880, he published the results of his collaboration with his father, in the book *The Movement of Plants*.

28 Sept 1855 There was a public outcry following the Government's announcement that it intended to build a bridge and footpath through St. James Park, London.

30 Sept 2010 Alan Titchmarsh's fourth autobiographical work, *When I was a Nipper*, was published. Previous works included *Trowel & Error* (2002), *Nobbut a Lad: A Yorkshire Childhood* (2006) and *Knave of Spades* (2009).

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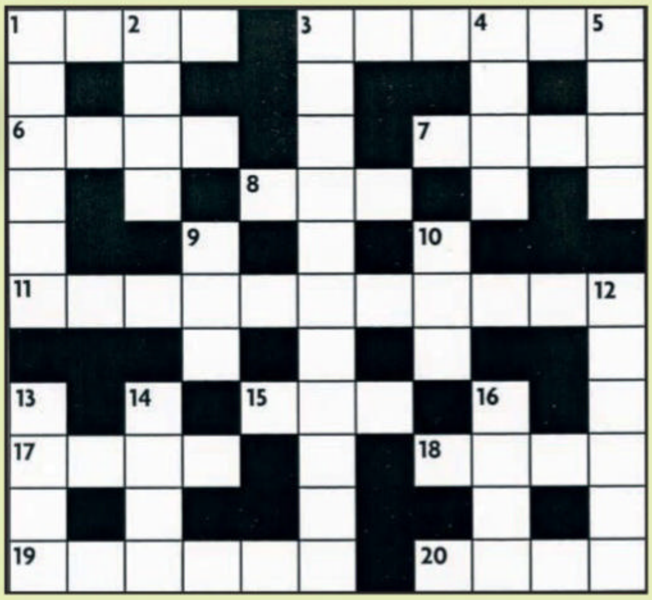
Crossword... just for fun!



ACROSS

1 Convallaria is of the valley! (4)
3 Lots of small, soft plants known botanically as musci (6)
6 In botany, an inflorescence in which the first flower is the terminal bud of the main stem and subsequent flowers are terminal buds of lateral stems, as in African violet (*Saintpaulia*) (4)
7 What many gardens have been over the last few months – for charity! (4)
8 Insect in the family Formicidae, typically living in large colony (3)
11 Tut day nurse! Old school name for learning about the natural world! (6,5) (anag)
15 Table tennis, cricket, the greater horseshoe and pipistrelle! (3)
17 Type of tall, stiff perennial grass-like plant growing in groups near water (4)
18 In plants, this is an unsightly growth caused by a type of wasp (4)
19 Try elm? Instead, you have a fragrant shrub! (6) (anag)
20 The wind did this, to the sound of the colour of gentians! (4)

DOWN

1 Plant-like organism that typically forms a low, crusty, leaf-like or branching growth on trees, rocks and walls, and trees (6)
2 Animal associated with *Stachys byzantina* – and mint! (4)
3 In reference to 'looking after' – such as a garden perhaps (4)
4 This month – contracted! (4)
5 Loose, granular component of many soils, resulting from the erosion of siliceous and other rocks! (4)
9 *Eucalyptus gunnii* is commonly known as the cider ____ (3)
10 Pen or enclosure for swine, as in mistyped honesty! (3)
12 Flowers of creeping jenny, golden rod and laburnum are generally of this! (6)
13 *Primula denticulata* is known as the ____stick primula (4)
14 Animal associated with *Acanthus mollis* – and breeches! (4)
16 Erysimum is the flower for this type of garden structure! (4)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE

ACROSS 2 Lily 3 Mosses 6 Cyme 7 Open 8 Ant 11 Nature study 15 Bat 17 Reed 18 Gall 19 Myrtle 20 Blew **DOWN** 1 Lichen 2 Lamb 3 Maintenance 4 Sept 5 Sand 9 Gum 10 Sty 12 Yellow 13 Drum 14 Bear 16 Wall

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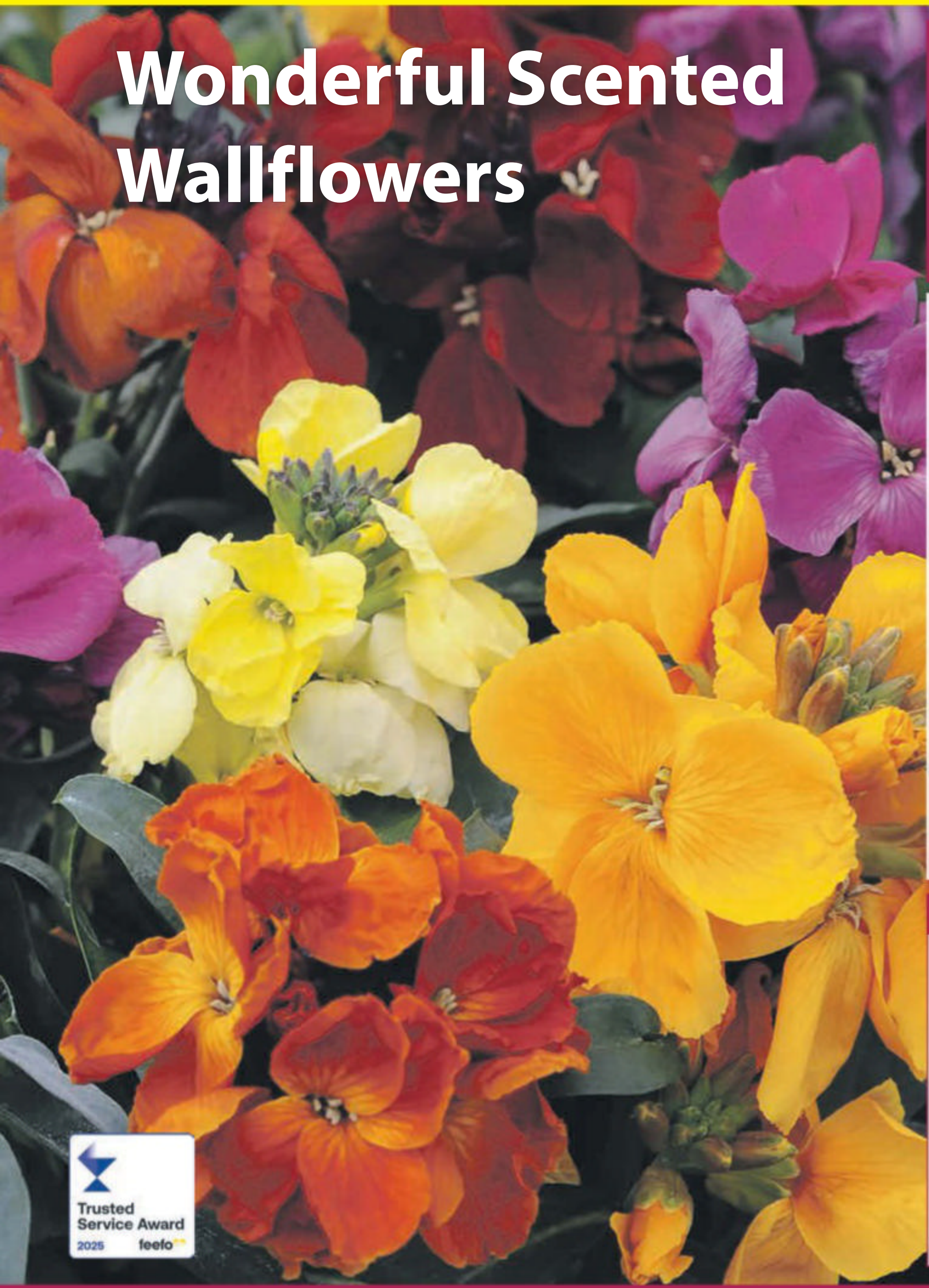

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Hurry offer ends October 7th

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- Tough enough to cope in even the poorest of soils

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Bare Roots despatching from October onwards

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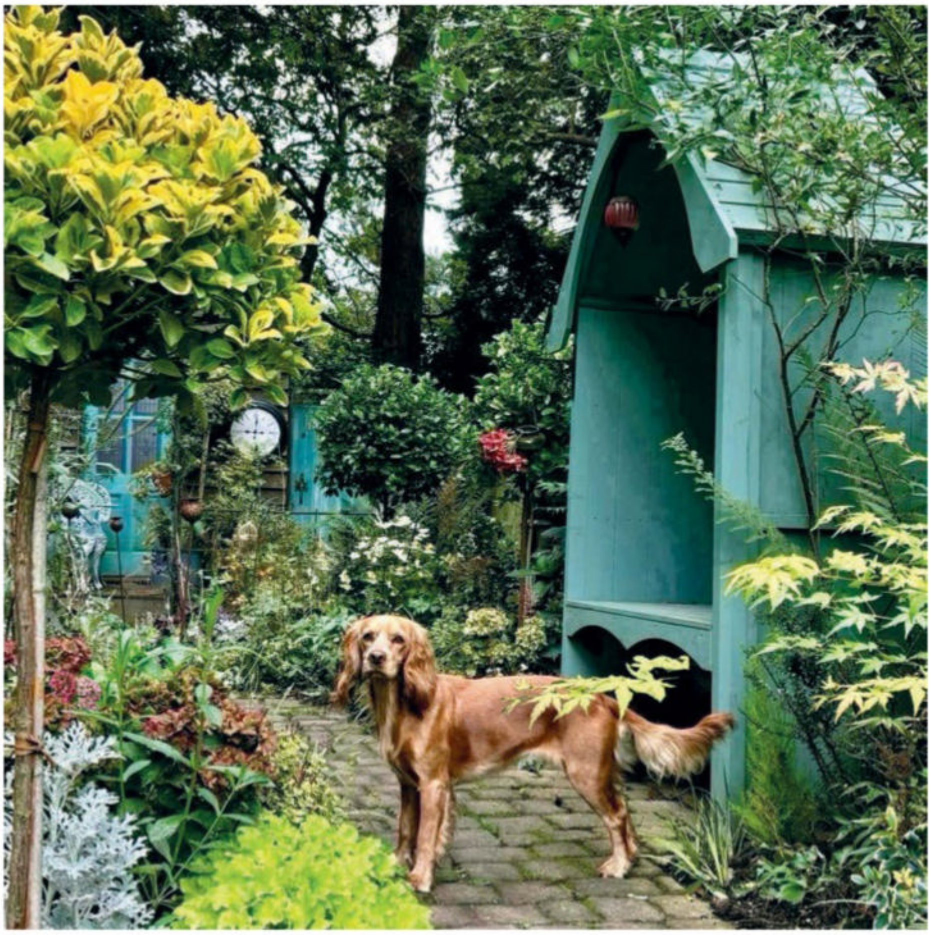
Creating a Victoriana garden of memories

Siog's garden has changed with her family through the decades, but she has been able to realise her dream of creating a precious Victorian-style plot full of character, memories and whimsical structures



Siog Gray tells us how her beloved garden has blended family life and a tranquil sanctuary

If I was to sum up my garden in one sentence it would be: *A charming Victorian-inspired haven, filled with whimsical features, treasured memories, and a blend of creativity and resilience that reflects the journey of our life and home*.

Forty years ago, as newlyweds brimming with excitement, we moved into a house in North London that many would have turned their back on. It had stood derelict for years, a probate sale waiting for a brave soul to breathe life into it. With more enthusiasm than experience, we began to tackle the overwhelming task of transforming this neglected space into a home. Little did we know, the garden would become as much a reflection of our journey as the house itself.

A Victorian vision

With no prior knowledge of gardening, I only knew one thing - that I wanted the garden to complement the traditional Victorian style of the house. Armed with ideas and with very little money to spare, I began slowly planting shrubs and plants kindly donated from someone else's garden or grown from seed, tending them as I went.

The garden was an unusual shape, which some might have found challenging, but I saw it as an opportunity to create a series of 'rooms' around the patio, intimate, cosy spaces that made the most of the land.

A garden divided

As our family grew, the garden had to adapt. Footballs flew, trampolines bounced and a Wendy house provided hours of imaginative play. To keep the chaos contained (and preserve my precious plants), we divided the garden in two with reclaimed Victorian railings. It became a practical yet beautiful boundary, allowing me to tend my sanctuary while the children claimed their territory on the other side.

Siog with current 'garden helper' Mabel

A new chapter begins

Years passed, the children grew, and one by one they left home. The football goals, trampoline and Wendy house were rehomed, and suddenly I had a blank canvas where their garden had been. The games room at the end of the garden, once a hub of teenage parties, became my potting shed, a space where I could dream, plan and store my tools.

Bit by bit, I dug borders and then widened them, my ambitions growing alongside my garden. Inspired by visions of the hot BBC series *The Good Life*, I added raised vegetable beds, but my green-thumbed fantasies were short-lived.

One impulsive day, the vegetables made way for something much more fitting: a Victorian-style arbour built by my husband, with a chandelier and a charming cast iron patio set discovered on the pavement.

An old fireplace found its home here too, surrounded by bricks salvaged from my son's demolished outdoor toilet. These also became the floor for the arbour and a winding path leading into the garden.

Paths, roses and memories

As the borders grew wider and harder to access, I began cutting paths through them, adding structure and a sense of exploration. Two pairs of bench ends retrieved from skips were restored, each becoming a focal point and a quiet spot to sit. Visits to Sissinghurst inspired me to create a rose garden, and what was once a rockery became a fragrant haven

All images unless otherwise credited: Siog Gray

Siog's garden is a sanctuary full of hidden nooks where she and her husband can sit and reflect on the life they have built and the memories this precious space holds

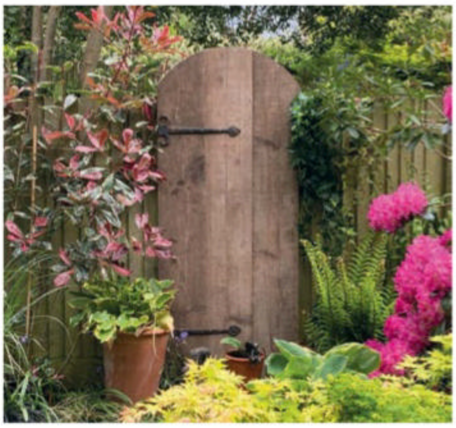
Above: **Siog says the winding paths in her garden give visitors a 'sense of exploration'**

with roses planted either side of a brick pathway.

Before our youngest left to join the RAF, he dug the foundations for our pond in a shady, clay-heavy patch where I thought nothing would grow. Over time, I discovered plants like *Persicaria spp*, ferns, and euonymus could thrive there. However, placing the pond too close to the fence left an awkward, barren space that stuck out terribly.

Then, during a visit to Parcevall Hall in the Yorkshire Dales, inspiration struck when I spotted an old door. With my love for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in mind, I created my own 'Jacob Marley door' using scaffold boards, salvage yard hinges and a characterful knocker. This quirky addition transformed the area into a charming garden feature and it works perfectly!

The garden grew with love and resourcefulness. Nearly everything was grown from seed or gifted as birthday and Christmas presents - roses, small trees, and other treasures planted with care. Paths now weave through each section, leading from one 'room' to another, connecting stories and memories.



Above: **The 'Jacob Marley door' made from scaffolding boards and old hinges adds quirky character and really suits the spot**

A place of reflection

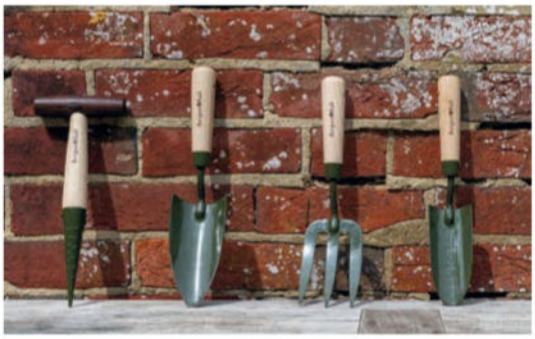
Today, this garden is our sanctuary, a Victorian haven where my husband and I sit and reflect on the life we've built. Each seating area holds memories of laughter, love, and even loss. Yellow ribbons tied around delicate angels remember the children who never had the chance to play here, while the graves of beloved pets rest under shaded corners. Forgotten artifacts left by previous owners are displayed where they were found, adding a layer of history to this already storied space.

The garden is a tapestry of moments, a place where we celebrate the lives that grew here and the ones who touched it fleetingly. From the joyous chaos of childhood to the quiet reflection of later years, this little piece of Victorian heaven is more than a garden; it's a testament to resilience, creativity, and love.

It may have started as a derelict plot attached to an old house and while there was never a plan or the money to implement anything overnight, what we did have was vision. Today it stands as my haven, my sanctuary, and a living reminder of how far we've come.

With our dog Mabel we now look forward to the next chapter of our garden, and with the arrival of our first two grandchildren in March and April we look forward to another generation to play in the garden. One thing is for certain though, there won't be any more goal posts or trampolines!

If you want to follow my journey, I have an instagram account 'IMINDAGARDEN', which was set up by my daughter three years ago. The name was derived from the fact that when my children could never get hold of me and would say, 'where were you we've been calling you' my reply would always be 'I'm in the garden'



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Spring bulbs such as crocus are so versatile and can be planted in borders and pots, in the lawn and under trees for low-maintenance joy and colour

Gardening for wellbeing

In this monthly series, the fantastic folk at health charity, **Thrive** offer a lovely project idea to help you find excuses to enjoy the nurturing potential of your garden

Project – planting out spring bulbs

Duration: 60 to 90 minutes

Lots of bulbs can be planted in autumn. You can then rest through winter and let nature do the work. In spring, enjoy watching as green shoots burst through the soil, followed by colourful flowers. Planting bulbs can be satisfying and is relatively low-cost. It is a good activity for gardeners of every level of experience

Items you will need

Bulbs
Trowel/bulb planter
Gardening gloves
Compost
Plant labels (or lollipop sticks)

How to make it easier

- Plant in pots so you can easily remember where they are.
- Use a bulb planter to dig holes.
- Make use of a kneeler if working at ground level.
- Choose plants with bigger bulbs that are less fiddly to plant, like alliums or large tulip and daffodil varieties

Planting in pots can make bulb planting easier. These are some ways to make planting spring bulbs outdoors easier to do.

Above: Spring bulbs are available now and are best sown in autumn. You can find them in garden centres, supermarkets and online

Choose your bulbs

Daffodils
Good for lawns, beds and containers - flowering late winter to early spring

Snowdrops
Good for lawns or anywhere - flowering late winter to mid spring

Crocus
Lovely for lawns or wherever you fancy - flowering late winter to early spring

Tulips
Good for beds and borders, or pots - flowering through spring

Snake's head fritillary
Ideal for woodland edges, wildflower meadows and containers - flowering mid-spring

Alliums
Ideal for beds although they can grow very tall - flowering late spring to early summer

Some planting ideas

There are lots of places you could plant bulbs.

- You could scatter them across the lawn and plant them where they land.
- Create a colourful spring bed or border.
- Add to a container with other plants.
- Create a container that just has bulbs growing.

How to reach out to others

- Talk to others about what you are hoping to plant and what you have planted so far.
- If you have excess bulbs, you could gift them to friends or neighbours.
- You could offer to help someone with their bulb planting, or work with someone else when planting in your own space.

How to plant bulbs

- Open your bulb packet and check your bulbs first. If any bulbs look unhealthy (e.g. damaged or mouldy) add them to your compost or garden waste.
- In general, bulbs should be planted in a hole two to three times as deep as the bulb is long.
- A garden trowel is good for digging small holes. A bulb planter is even easier to use. It is specially designed to take out a plug of soil to pop your bulb into.
- Put the bulbs in the hole with the pointed tip facing upwards. If you accidentally put the bulbs in the wrong way round, it doesn't usually matter. They should still grow, but might just take a bit longer.
- Fill planting holes with compost and water well.
- Mark where you planted your bulbs using a plant label, lollipop stick or colourful stone so you remember what you planted, where. There is no need to label bulbs planted in the lawn.
- Always wear gloves when planting bulbs as they can cause skin irritation, and wash your hands afterwards.

Would you like more wellbeing inspiration?

Thrive is a gardening for health charity that supports people to transform their lives through gardening.You can find out more wellbeing gardening activities through their Cultivating Wellbeing app which helps you garden your way to better health. Visit *www.thrive.org.uk/cultivatingwellbeing*

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THE SELF-SUFFICIENT (ish) GARDENER

with **Andrew Oldham**

Andrew explains why a childlike enthusiasm for fruit foraging feeds the soul as well as filling the freezer and larder with nature's free bounty

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Where the wild fruits grow

Nature's bounty is probably a lot closer than you think, says happy fruit forager **Andrew Oldham**

All images unless otherwise credited: Andrew Oldham

I cannot pass a fruit tree or bush without giving the fruit a little taste. There are fruit trees and bushes around my area, lost in thickets of sycamore or bramble, that have been left to languish. I often come across fruit trees and bushes by roadsides, on abandoned plots or beside laybys.

My wife, Carol, and I have a forager's map and every tree, from fruit to nut, is logged in ever-increasing circles. The smallest circle is within a mile of our home, and these harvests can be brought back in a shopping trolley, a bag or, in an emergency, a jumper.

There are many fruit forging opportunities close to home if you know where to look

© Shutterstock

Andrew and wife Carol always ask permission before foraging on private land and give thank you pies or drinks in return

After that, the circles get bigger and to forage in them, we use a car or public transport.

I was once refused entry to a bus by the driver who eyed my bags of bullace and pears with suspicion. I was also once stopped by the police who asked what I was going to do with the sloes in my possession, and I have been stopped by many members of the public while picking blackberries.

I am more than happy to share my bounty with them and nothing beats watching a stranger's face light up when they taste a delicious fruit picked fresh from a tree.

Ask permission, give a gift

For the record, we have always asked permission to forage when it's clear the land is privately owned because, otherwise, it is trespass and theft and we don't want any of that thank you. Where kindly landowners have allowed us in, I always return with a pie, a cake or a drink made from the fruits foraged from their place by way of thanks.

Occasionally we get asked, 'why are you doing it?' To which my answer would be 'why not? Our ancestors foraged and for many who do not have a garden, this is their only real opportunity to get out into nature, which is often closer than you think, even in an urban area. It does wonders for our wellbeing and mental health, searching outside for food that is free and useful.'

Above: **Apple harvests are put to good use with sugar-free pies, purees for the freezer, vinegar and cider**

When I lived in a bustling city, I loved this time of year. The canal banks brimmed with blackberries and I would often go into my work's car park to harvest the hazel nuts. Nature finds a way of getting close, and many fruits are within walking distance of us all.

I take only what I will use and leave the rest. Never strip a tree, bush or bramble bare because without that abundance your local wildlife will go hungry.

From pies and crumbles to vinegar and cider-making

This seasonal bounty in the city was the first step towards my understanding of how to preserve fruits, with apples turned into crumbles and pies. As I got older, and my freezer got bigger, I would batch cook my crumbles and pies and then started to make stewed apple because I was tired from a day at work.

I found that if I mixed cookers and eating apples, peeled and cored, I didn't need to add sugar. This mix was frozen in bags and easily cooked from frozen in a pan, where I would add nutmeg, and serve it with cream or custard.

Carol brought me an apple press and I started to play around with making my own cider, apple juice and cider vinegar. The peelings would bubble as they fermented in a jar with water and sugar. I always made sure

Andrew putting together an apple press and, inset, apple juice making

the apples were submerged to prevent mould.

After a few weeks, I would strain out the apple peelings and then let the liquid sit, covered by a cheesecloth for another few weeks to allow the alcohol to convert into acetic acid. I would regularly taste until I found it vinegary enough, and then bottle.

At the same time, the apples would be cut up, placed in a gallon tub, bashed to a mash and then put in muslin bags in the apple press. The first apple juice I ever made was heavenly, so I decided to try cider. It was easier than expected, with the addition of some yeast in a demijohn and the resulting brew tasted great, so easy to drink.

As with the preserving of all late-summer fruit, homemade cider was a reminder of warmth in the midst of winter. But unlike crumble, it made you want to dance around a fire after the last of the harvest had come in, as you sang to nature, and rejoiced in the world beyond work.

Future thinking

As annuals set seed, use a brown paper bag and collect seeds from your favourite flowers. The seedheads should be dry to the touch and, when turned upside down, will pour their seeds into the paper bag.

I love mixing cornflowers, love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*), cosmos, calendula and poppy together in one paper bag.

I then write what seeds they are on the bag and sow them in early spring in situ to create a wonderful mix that I can harvest from in years to come.

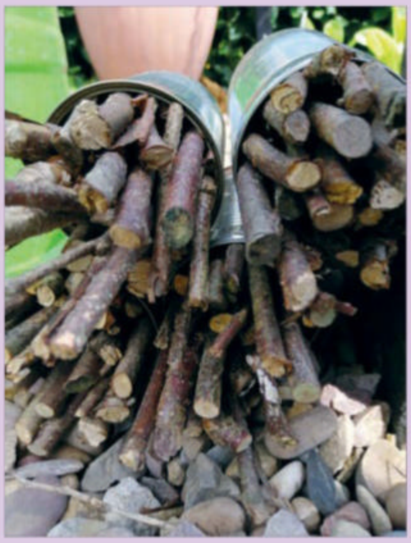
Above: Annual flower seeds are easily home-harvested

Making a tin can bug motel

You will need: five used cans, a can opener, a pair of secateurs and some old sticks, dried grass and small pine cones.

1. With some warm water carefully remove the labels on the cans.
2. Wash the cans thoroughly with soapy warm water.
3. Use a can opener to remove the bottom of each can to create a metal tube.
4. Cut some old sticks with the secateurs so that they are slightly longer than the cans.
5. Pack the sticks into the cans with some small pine cones and dried grass (optional). You can also use old bamboo canes.
6. Place the cans in a quiet place. I stack mine like a pyramid at the end of our garden paths and under hedges, using old bricks and slate to stop them from moving. This creates a small bug hotel which will quickly become a shelter for small beasties.

My can bug motel is now over six years old and still going. It is home to numerous ground beetles and ladybirds. As the sticks decay, I replace them in late summer.



Above: Andrew explains how to make an easy and attractive bug habitat using available items from the home and garden

Jobs for the fortnight

1. Lift gladioli corms, dry them off, and store in a frost-free shed in brown paper bags.

3. Sow hardy greens, such as kale, mizuna, lamb's lettuce and mustard, for winter pickings. I grow mizuna, lamb's lettuce and mustard in the greenhouse.

3. Prune out all the fruited canes of summer raspberries, cutting them down to the base, and tie in new canes to wires. Check posts holding the wire and replace if rotten.

4. Pot up herbs such as chives, oregano and thyme, and place them on a sunny windowsill to use during winter.

5. Start sowing hardy varieties of broad beans and peas for early crops next year.

Pot up herbs from the garden to bring indoors for winter-long pickings

About **Andrew Oldham**

■ Andrew Oldham is a self-sufficient(ish) gardener who believes in the joy of down-to-earth growing and cooking. He lives high on the Saddleworth hills with his family at Pig Row. Find him on all social media platforms as **@lifeonpigrow**

GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**, *AG*'s gardening expert

The delicate scent of evening enchantment

Ancient catch-fly will attract more than pollinators

I love a plant with an intriguing name, so something like night-flowering catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*) doesn't just float my boat, but sails away with me completely.

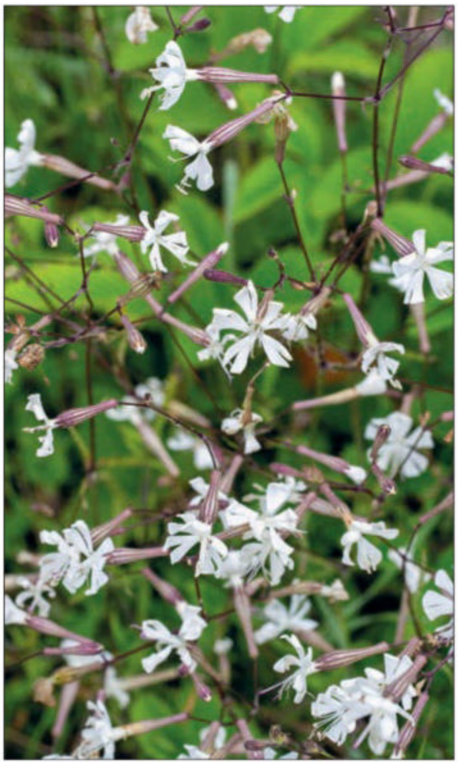
A domesticated wildflower that looks remarkably similar to white campion, this catchfly does exactly what it says on the tin: its flowers in shades of pink, or white open at dusk and are pollinated by night-flying insects.

The flowers have a sweet scent, making them perfect for growing alongside garden seating areas and pathways.

The 'catchfly' part of their name derives from the sticky hairs that cover the plants, just tacky enough to hold on to insects while they go about the important business of pollination.

These are robust plants, introduced to the UK in ancient times and since then springing up in wasteland and cultivated ground, though the increased use of chemicals has lessened their foothold severely.

Sow the seeds thinly on a sunny patch of prepared and dampened soil at any time of year. Cover with more soil and gently firm it down. If the seedlings appear too close together, thin them out.



Above: Night-flowering catchfly will lend its night time scent to pathways and seating areas

Mature plants will self-seed if not deadheaded, and the seeds can remain viable in the soil for several years.

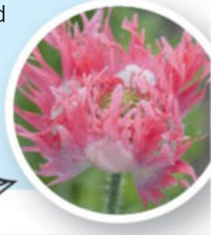
Catchfly lends itself perfectly to cottage gardens and wildflower areas, and they will delight pollinators - so definitely one to add to your garden for next year.

All images credit: © Shutterstock

Bubbling with excitement!

We're in the pink with a new poppy

- Poppies are a joy, whether you grow the annual field or opium poppies or splendid perennial Oriental varieties.
- Each year breeders seem to present us with new varieties, either new colours such as the delectable dove grey 'Amazing Grey' or new flower shapes, such as the gloriously effervescent and eye-catching 'Pink Fizz'.
- This is one I definitely want to try next year; an annual *Papaver somniferum* with remarkable, 'tatty' looking bicoloured pink and white petals that erupt in a firework of excitement and colour.
- The seedheads that are left when petals fall are an attractive shade of slate grey, so they will be much in demand by flower arrangers and for bouquets.
- Despite its unconventional appearance, 'Pink Fizz' is easy-going and hardy, and can be sown now, or in spring, in soil that has been cleared of weeds and debris and raked to a fine tilth.
- Label the seedbed to avoid disturbance and protect it from birds and cats.



'Pink Fizz' promises to be a summertime stunner

What's On

19 Sept: Open Day & Plant Sale, Knoll Gardens, Hampreston, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7ND. Explore and buy ornamental grasses. 2-4.30pm.

19-24 Sept: Annual Bulb Bonanza, Whichford Pottery, Whichford, near Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire, CV36 5PG. Bulbs for sale.

19-21 Sept: A Celebration of the Late Summer Bounty, Dalemain House and Gardens, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 0HB. Celebrate apples, the harvest and bees and have your own apples juiced (please bring clean fruit and a container).

20 Sept: Plant Swap, Community Hub at Manchester Craft and Design Centre, 17 Oak Street, Manchester, M4 5JD. Noon til 1pm.

20 Sept: Apple Festival, Christ Church, Wyresdale Road, Lancaster, Lancashire, LA1 3EA. Juicing, stalls, children's activities and much more.

21 Sept: Plant Fair, Felley Priory, Underwood, Nottinghamshire, NG16 5FJ. Browse and buy.

21 Sept: Rare Plant Fair, Llanover House, Llanover, near Abergavenny NP7 9EF. Your chance to buy something unusual.

21 Sept: Plant Fair, Borde Hill Gardens, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 1XP. Browse specialist nurseries.

21 Sept: The Therapy Garden Opening & Plant Sale, Therapy Garden, Manor Fruit Farm, Glaziers Lane, Normandy, Guildford, Surrey, GU3 2DT. Support this excellent charity that uses gardening to have a positive impact.

26-28 Sept: Malvern Autumn Show, Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6NW. A fabulous day out.

27 Sept: Seed Swap, South Hayling United Reformed Church, Hollow Lane, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 9EY. 10am-noon.

28 Sept: Plant Fair, Mount Ephraim Gardens, Staplestreet Road, Hernhill, Faversham, Kent, ME13 9TX. Specialist nurseries in a stunning setting.

28 Sept: Benmore Botanic Garden open day, Benmore Botanic Garden, Benmore, Dunoon, Argyll and Bute, Scotland, PA23 8QU. Visit this stunning 120-acre garden.

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

How can I get my clematis flowering again?

Dry weather has affected flowering in many plants

Q I have two clematis plants that face east. I have deadheaded the purple clematis frequently and it is quite happily flowering till now. I also have a *Clematis viticella* 'Alba' that I also deadheaded but it did not flower again. There are funny fruit/seed heads on the branches. What can I do to make sure it is flowering OK next year?
Jan Schut (via email)

A Thank you for the attached images. I think, on balance, that your clematis are thriving. They've made good growth and have bloomed reasonably well.

The pink and white-hued variety could be 'Minuet', a *Clematis viticella* that normally blooms midsummer to autumn. Sadly, lack of rain has reduced its flowering potential, so it may not bloom for more than a few weeks from now. It is, however, still spectacular.

The one that you are calling 'Alba' is likely to be *C.* 'Alba Luxurians'. It has flowered disappointingly due to suffering from weeks of very little rain. That is why few new shoots and flowers have appeared.

Clematis should flower again next year with pruning, feeding and watering

The tendril-like growths on shoot tips are seed heads which, when mature, will become ornamentally fluffy.

The best way to encourage your clematis to excel and flower bounteously is to water frequently in dry spells.

Mulch the root area with a 7cm (3in) layer of composted manure, keeping it away from the main stem or multiple stems.

Feed with sulphate of potash, monthly, from April to September, sprinkling it over the root area and watering it in.

Precautions to take after tomato blight

Q Last year my tomatoes growing in the greenhouse beds were blighted, so this year I thought it was wise to grow tomatoes elsewhere. How long until I can grow again in my greenhouse soil?
Tom Archibald (via email)

A Rather than risk reinfection next year from overwintered spores, I urge you not to grow tomatoes in your greenhouse soil for three more years.

Instead, nurture them in 23cm (9in) diameter pots or similar containers filled with a quality peat-free potting compost. Alternatively, use growbags that have been turned on their side.

Tomato blight, also known as late blight, is a serious fungal disease that attacks the whole plant in warm, damp weather.

It usually affects tomatoes grown outside, while those in greenhouses can succumb to tomato leaf mould, which looks very similar.

Both problems can be deterred by not wetting leaves when watering, making sure plants are well ventilated and taking care their compost doesn't completely dry out.

Don't compost diseased plants and disinfect growing areas.

Above: Blight, also called late blight, is a common problem in warm, damp summers

Quick questions & answers

Above: Pears should smell lovely and be easy to pick when ripe

How can I tell pears are ripe?

Q We have a three-year-old pear tree and this year we have 17 pears! We only had two last year. I understand the pears ripen after they have been picked. How do I know when they are ready to be picked?
Linda Dickins, Lichfield

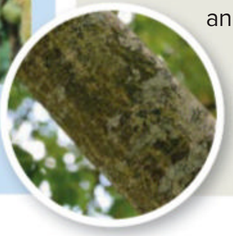
A To determine when pears are ripe and ready for picking, check by gently twisting them from the spur. If they part easily, consign each fruit to a paper bag, which must be sealed.

Then store them at room temperature for four to seven days to reach their deliciously juicy 'climacteric'.

What is this on my tree branches?

Q Should I be worried about this growing on my tree?
Mel Savage (via email)

A The interloper in question is lichen, a parasite/saprophyte that colonises twigs and large limbs in clean-air zones. It does not harm trees and is a sign of clean air.



Left: Lichen likes clean air and doesn't harm trees

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Why has my tomato produced unusual fruits?

Genetic mutations can occur and produce interesting results

Q Do you know what's happened to my tomato 'Riesling'? I've grown five plants from seeds I saved and all are fine except this strange looking one. It tastes perfectly normal.
Sue (via email)

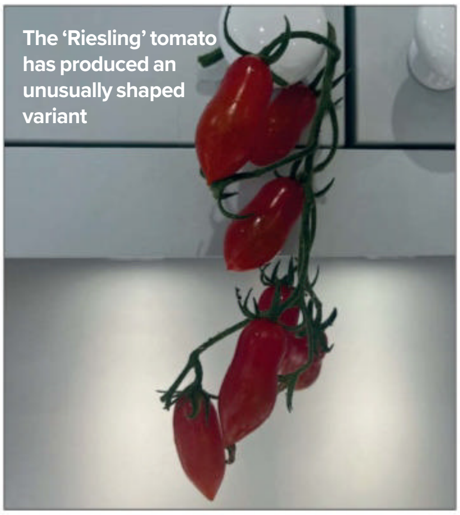
A Thank you for the attached image of what should be a tomato variety called 'Riesling', but isn't. Unlike the remainder of your plants which are correctly bearing globular fruits, the 'stranger' has much smaller, pointed fruits.

It is, in fact, a small plum variety often used for cooking and there could be two explanations for this.

If the seeds were commercially bought, I would suggest that a plum tomato seed inadvertently found itself in the same packet.

Seed companies take stringent steps to avoid this from happening, but occasionally it does. However, as yours came from a batch of home-saved 'Riesling' seeds, without doubt, the unusual-fruited plant is a genetic mutation: the result of genes behaving abnormally.

If you like it and wish to perpetuate this interesting 'deviant', save some seeds, dry them off and sow them early next year. It will be interesting to see how the plants develop and what kind of fruits they bear.



The 'Riesling' tomato has produced an unusually shaped variant

Can you say why our shrub died?

Q Our beautiful potted *Convolvulus cneorum* suddenly turned up its toes. Why did it do this? I saw no signs of vine weevil. Can I plant another one as it was such a favourite?
Jim Turner (via email)

A I am sorry that your *Convolvulus cneorum* shrub has died. There are many reasons for its demise: drought (especially common this summer), pests and honey fungus among them.

As you have checked for vine weevil grubs but didn't find any, remove a sliver of root bark.

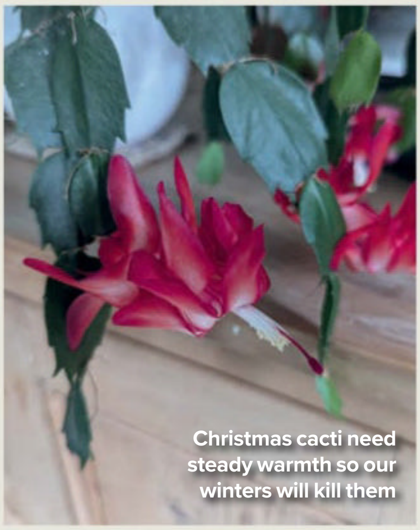
If white mould is evident and black bootlace-like rhizomorphs can be seen in the soil, honey fungus is to blame. Sadly, there are no remedies for this disease.

Do go ahead and buy another plant. If you wish to grow it in another container, use good quality peat-free compost with added grit to help drainage. If you wish to reuse the same container as before, make sure you wash it well beforehand with hot soapy water.

If you plant your *Convolvulus cneorum* in the soil, it likes a sheltered spot and free-draining soil that isn't too rich.

Above: A shrub such as this convolvulus can be replaced in a container using fresh soil or compost

Quick questions & answers



Christmas cacti need steady warmth so our winters will kill them

Will my cactus survive outside?

Q My Christmas cactus has loved a summer in the garden - can it stay there throughout winter too?
Jean Pellick (via email)

A Regrettably, your Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) is a tropical succulent from Brazil and needs to be kept in a temperature no lower than 10C/50F to prosper.

It cannot, therefore, be left outdoors over winter, for frost would kill it.

What is our exotic new arrival?

Q Please can you put a name to this gorgeous plant that's appeared in a border?
Mike Hewson (via email)

A It's a spider flower, probably a variety of *Cleome hassleriana*, a robust annual.

There are several enchanting forms sporting pink, rose, or white flowers.

A native of tropical and sub-tropical regions, it is one of our most appealing summer bedding plants.

Sadly they don't survive our winters, but are readily available to grow from seed, sown undercover in spring.

Left: Cleome are intriguing annuals easily grown from seed

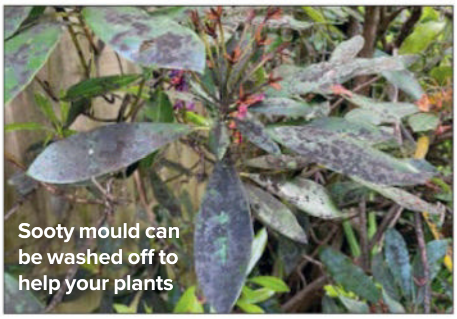
All images unless otherwise credited © Shutterstock

Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

What is this black stuff that is covering my shrub?

Sooty mould develops on honeydew produced by some pests



Sooty mould can be washed off to help your plants

Q **Is my rhododendron worth saving? Parts are covered in this black stuff, but the rest of the shrub appears OK. *AG* is fantastic reading, I look forward to receiving it every fortnight. I look forward to your reply**
G Boldero, Pontypridd

A Thank you for the attached images and that's great to hear how much you enjoy the magazine. The black patina on your rhododendron leaves is sooty mould, a fungus that's subsisting on honeydew, a substance that sap-feeding pests, such as aphids and scale insects, excrete.

Pleasingly, it's reasonably easy to control. Simply wipe foliage with lukewarm water to remove the mould. Additionally, encourage predators such as garden birds, ladybirds and hoverflies among them, to feast on sap-removing pests and guard your rhododendron from further attacks.

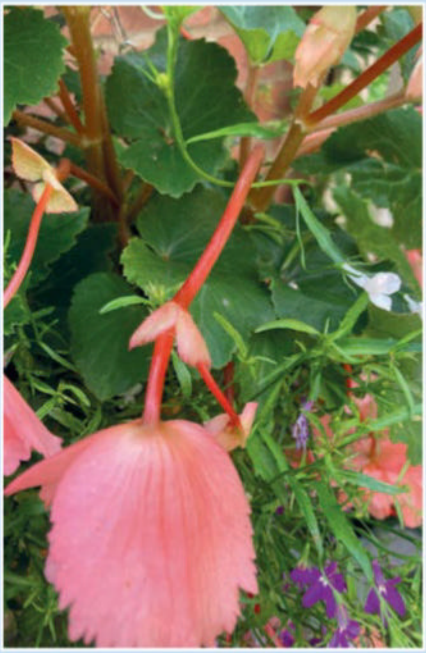
How to care for trailing begonias

Q **I have two hanging baskets with trailing begonias. I do not know where to prune them or deadhead them. What do I do when the flowers fall and is there anything to cut back?**
Jan Schut (via email)

A Thank you for the attached images. Pleasingly, your trailing begonias are in good health and performing well. Apart from gathering fallen blooms, which can drop every few days, no pruning is necessary. Just leave your plants to flourish and produce more flowers, deadheading regularly to further boost results.

The best way to encourage a plethora of blossoms, through to early autumn when chilly nights halt the display, is to liquid-feed twice weekly with a high-potash tomato fertiliser, making sure that the potting compost is damp at the time.

To save money, you can overwinter healthy tubers in trays of sand or compost somewhere frost-free, and restart them into growth next spring.



Above: Trailing begonias will shed flowers so don't need deadheading

Quick questions & answers

Clematis cuttings will survive winter in a frost-free place

Looking after clematis cuttings

Q **What is the best way to overwinter my little clematis cuttings?**
S Houghton, Essex

A As they are vulnerable to chilly conditions, overwinter them in a greenhouse, porch or cool room.

Next spring, when roots have filled their pots and pushed through drainage holes, move them into containers twice the size of those they are growing in at present using a mix of peat-free compost and grit.

Place them in a sunny, sheltered spot for summer and move them in early autumn to where you wish them to grow.

When should I move perennials?

Q **When should I move a couple of lupins? Now or in spring?**
John McDougal (via email)

A You can do it any time from now until early November, when the soil is still warm from summer. Initially, shorten them to within 23cm (9in) of the base and lift them carefully, with a good quantity of soil around their roots.

As the ground is dry after summer, water generously before removing your plants to ensure that soil clings to the root system and water them in their new home to encourage robust root growth.

Right: Cut back lupin stems before transplanting

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Find out where to enjoy warming and wonderful autumn colour displays such as those at Batsford Arboretum, near Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire

7 special places to see amazing autumn colours

Get set for the weeks ahead with these recommendations for great gardens to visit

'As long as autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas, and colours enough to paint the beautiful things I see'
– Vincent van Gogh

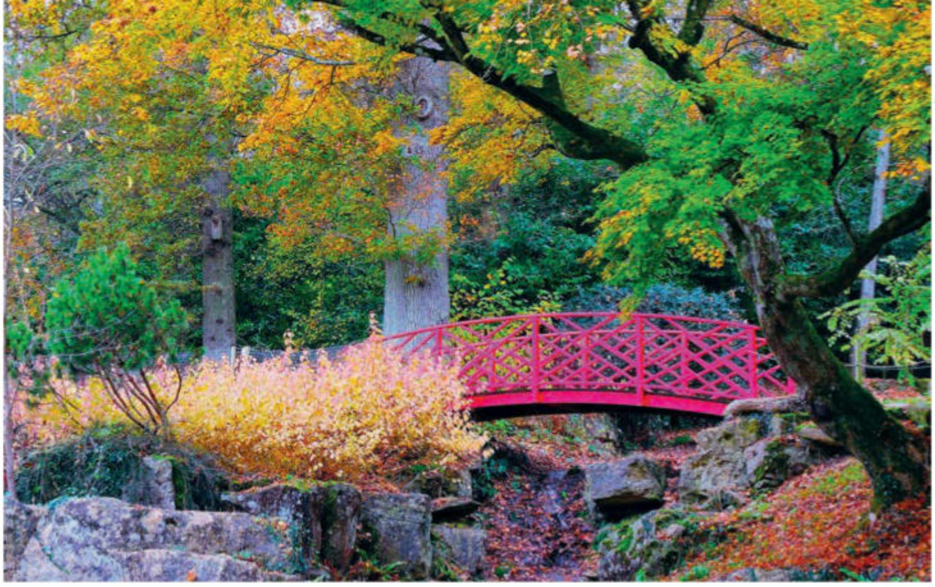
All images © Great British Gardens

Aberglasney Gardens, Carmarthenshire, Wales

A sublime historic garden restoration that was made famous by the BBC television series *A Garden Lost in Time*. Come autumn and the Woodland Walk gives amazing displays of autumn colours. Discover the Ninfarium, an award-winning indoor garden found within the ruined interior walls of the mansion.

- **Café, partial disabled access.**

Aberglasney in Wales blazes brilliant colours every autumn



Throughout autumn, Batsford Arboretum in the Cotswolds is a riot of dazzling colours

Above: Stourhead in Wiltshire has follies and temples to explore in its gardens

Batsford Arboretum, near Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire

Set in 56 acres of lovely Cotswold countryside, the arboretum contains over 1,500 trees with species from all over the world giving spectacular autumn displays. Batsford Arboretum includes one of the largest Pulham rock gardens in Britain. It is 600 metres long and borders a stream that tumbles down the hillside thronged by colourful shrubs and trees.

- **Café, garden centre, partial disabled access, dog friendly.**

Fountains Abbey, North Yorkshire (National Trust)

One of the most beautiful places in Britain, the abbey includes the UNESCO World Heritage site Studley Royal Water Gardens. The landscape is famous for the spectacular remains of the 12th century Fountains Abbey, the Elizabethan Fountains Hall and a medieval deer park. Beautiful at any time but especially in autumn. Allow a whole day for your visit.

- **Café, disabled access., dog friendly.**

© National Trust / Andrew Butler

Above: Fountains Abbey combines beautiful gardens with centuries of history

Sheffield Park, Sussex (National Trust)

Set in the beautiful Sussex countryside this amazing park was set out by Capability Brown in the 18th century. The landscape includes iconic bridges and the Pulham Falls cascade linking five mirror-like lakes and creating dramatic reflections of shape, texture and colour. Ideal for a walk in autumn amongst the glorious changing colours

- **Café, Disabled Access, Dog Friendly.**

Above: St Andrews Botanic Garden is one of the jewels in Scotland's autumnal crown

St Andrews Botanic Garden, Fife, Scotland

This site has 18 acres of gardens that look gorgeous all year. Discover the Water Garden with the sound of water splashing on the rocks adding a sensual dimension to this area as well as providing a range of habitats for wildlife. Autumn is glorious with all shades of colour both in the flower borders and woodland.

- **Disabled access.**

Above: Late-flowering perennials combine with autumn-coloured leaves to create a stunning display

Stourhead, Wiltshire (National Trust)

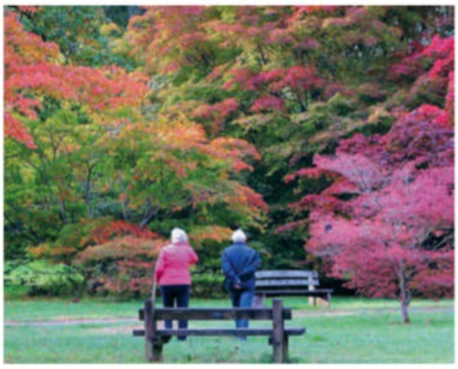
Take a walk in autumn around Stourhead and its lake and you'll agree it's one of the most beautiful landscape gardens in the world. Discover a wonderful selection of temples including the Temple of Flora and Temple of Apollo, plus a rock bridge and cascade, all of which are situated around the tranquil lake. Stunning colours and reflections surround you everywhere you walk.

- **Café, disabled access, dog friendly.**

Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire

One of the finest places to see autumn colours in Britain, with over 18,000 trees from all over the world. The arboretum is in two areas with 17 miles of waymarked trails. Between October and mid-November there are magnificent displays of golds, yellows, and reds not only from the maples, but also from native trees. Allow a whole day to make the best of your visit.

- **Café, disabled access, dog friendly in the Silk Wood.**



Above: Acers and native species combine to put on a memorable seasonal show at Westonbirt Arboretum

Great British GARDENS

The best time to see autumn colours often depends on preceding weather patterns but ranges from early October to the middle of November. The peak time is generally the last week in October.

For further details of these gardens and beautiful autumn colours near you near you, visit *www.greatbritishgardens.co.uk* or scan the QR code here.

Your LETTERS TO KIM

The *AG* team love receiving your letters, emails and social media posts and finding out what your gardens mean to you. Every message, poem, idea and comment matters. Please keep them coming. We will send out a thank you gift for every item published in the magazine as soon as we can, so do please send your address and contact details when you get in touch.

Homegrown blooms

Dear Kim,
I have recently started reading *Amateur Gardening* magazine and would like to say how much I have been enjoying it! It is really different to other garden magazines and has so many interesting articles.

I love to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables in our garden and at our allotment. I also love to grow cut flowers and I was so pleased with these asters which I planted from a seed packet which were a gift on your magazine a few months ago.

Here's a photo (along with cosmos and tithonia) of the beautiful asters!

Dianne Hart

Kim says; thank you Dianne, that's so great to hear you are enjoying being part of the *AG* family - and so lovely to see the homegrown blooms

New reader Dianne's gorgeous asters and cut flowers

Lovely community gardening idea

Our local village had a scarecrow trail with over 40 scarecrows all around the village. The theme was my favourite book. Here's my entry The Mad Hatter's Garden Party. Hundreds of children young and old enjoyed the trail and raised money for our local school. We're hoping to make it a annual event.

Many thanks
Janet Powell

Kim says; what a wonderful and inspiring community event. Thank you for sharing.

Janet's Mad Hatter scarecrow in her front garden raised money for the local school

An excellent idea to protect hostas from slugs

This year I thought I would give up on growing hostas as the leaves got so chewed before. However, I was trimming the stems of the wild dog rose that the birds had bought into the garden and realised that the stems were almost all very sharp prickles of all sizes. I placed them round the hosta plants in early spring and lo and behold no slug damage all summer!!

It saves a fortune on products, I thought other gardeners might like to try this method and see how they get on.

Best wishes
Caroline Holloway

Kim says; that's brilliant to hear. A lovely no-cost, innovative way to protect plants and work around what you have to hand. Thank you so much for sharing. We'd love to hear other ideas of natural, no-cost pest control solutions of this kind, please do write in and share.

Reader Caroline has come up with a free way of protecting her hostas from slug damage

© Shutterstock

As reader Elizabeth points out there have been a lot of cabbage white butterflies this year

© Shutterstock

So many cabbage white butterflies this year!

Dear Editor
I have seen a lot of cabbage white butterflies this year. I live in Exeter, Devon, and wondered if the abundance is just down here or nationwide?

Elizabeth Hayward

Kim says; you are absolutely right Elizabeth, haven't there just been a lot of cabbage whites!. It's been a good year for butterflies and moths in general. They have loved the weather this summer, which has been a challenge for brassicas. Toby Buckland wrote in the last issue about encouraging wasps in to help keep caterpillar numbers in check (as they are natural predators) by placing windfall apples nearby, which I think is a brilliant idea. Every year is different and so we try and work around each season as it comes.

Sharing the homegrown joy

Dear Kim
Most of this is homegrown or homemade. Yum yum. It's not all about toiling in the garden, we have to enjoy the fruits of our labour, and possibly invite others around to share!

John Michael Edwards

Kim says; that looks fantastic John and so true, it's important to spend time enjoying our gardens and harvest and revelling in the joy that brings.

HOMEMADE TOMATO CHUTNEY John & Liz
HOMEMADE STRAWBERRY JAM John & Liz
HOMEMADE PICKLED ONIONS John & Liz

Reader John encourages us all to relish in the fruits of our labour

Please send us your letters, poems and musings

Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in. We will send a gift for each letter, poem and musing published.

Address: Kim Stoddart | *Amateur Gardening* magazine | Kelsey Publishing Ltd. | The Granary | Downs Court | Yalding Hill | Yalding | Maidstone | Kent | ME18 6AL

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Amateur GARDENING
2 FREE PACKETS OF SEEDS
AMAZING AUTUMN IDEAS!
FRUIT FORAGING FUN!

PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Exciting recommendations from our expert plantsman

This easier-to-grow variety is also brilliant for pollinators: *Echinacea purpurea* PollyNation™ Series

6 of the coolest customers for future hot summers

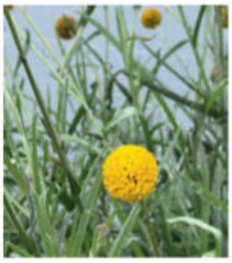
Michael reveals his pick of the plants that can take the heat and still shine, and which can be grown from seed

As we head further into autumn, let's keep feeling some heat after the summer we've just had with a little rewind, looking at some of the best hot weather-tolerant plants.

Who knows what weather we'll get next year. Sometimes summer is gentle and pleasant, even a little chilly, yet at other times (like the summer just gone), it kicks down the door like a fire-breathing dragon. That's why I went plant-hunting at Benary in Germany, where I discovered a bunch of perennials that can take the heat without melting like an ice cream cone at a barbecue.

They come in all shapes and sizes, and honestly, they're the type of plants that will perform like champs in hot-weather conditions. The best bit is they are all available to grow from seed as well, so are a cost-effective, hardy option all-round.

All images © Michael Perry



Craspedia globosa SolarPop

These are basically the ping-pong balls of the flower world, tiny yellow spheres of joy! Florists love them, but they're just as fabulous in the garden. Stick them in a pot, drop them into a border, and suddenly you've got a garden that shines, whatever the weather.

Echinacea purpurea PollyNation™ Series

Think of this as echinacea's cooler, easier-to-grow cousin who doesn't complain about the weather. It's seed-raised, flowers quickly, and is a pollinator magnet. The bees will thank you, with lots of happy buzzing.

Lobelia erinus Masterpiece (experimental)

This one's fancy - it's an F1 hybrid, so it has been selected and bred for the best possible traits. Unlike the old-school lobelias that fainted in the heat, this one powers through summer without so much as breaking a sweat.

Pentas lanaceolata Graffiti® Series

Never heard of pentas? You're not alone. But you're going to want them once you see their pastel colours, like scoops of summer gelato for your garden. And the best part? They thrive in the heat.

Tithonia rotundifolia 'Fiesta del Sol'

If summer had a mascot, this would be it. Compact, vibrant, and bursting with fiery orange blooms, it's basically a garden fiesta in plant form. Bees line up for nectar like it is happy hour, and honestly, who can blame them?

Celosia plumosa Smart Look

Ah, *celosia*! Once upon a time, it lived on my grandma's windowsill, but now it's strutting its stuff on patios everywhere. These heat-loving beauties bring bold, cheerful colour to patios and gardens.

mrplantgeek.substack.com

TOBY'S TALKING
NATURAL SEED HARVESTING

Toby reveals how to save seed from plants that readily self -seed

The secrets of successful seed gathering

Toby explains how plants will tell you whether they're happy to reliably seed, or not

All images unless otherwise credited: Shutterstock

Clearing out the back of our car, I found a bag of clothes. I say 'found', they'd been in the boot and 'on the way' to the clothes bank for months, and might have made it too, if I hadn't clocked that the contents were in better nick than what I was wearing. So, instead of the recycling centre, they're now back in the drawer from whence they came.

I mention this because a similar thing happened when I drove the now cleaned-

The *Verbena hastata* family grow well alongside late-flowering varieties of prairie plants such as rudbeckias and asters ↗

Inset image © Toby Buckland

Toby recommends collecting seed from enthusiastically self-seeding varieties such as poppies

out car to visit my aunt in Oxfordshire. Judith is a very keen gardener and back when I owned a nursery I'd often send her plants that I really liked as presents. Most have thrived and gently spread, including a few that I'd completely forgotten that I once owned.

There was a scabious called 'Moon Dance' with flowers the colour of a harvest moon, a posh purple eupatorium with carob-coloured leaves and the lovely versatile *Verbena hastata* f. *rosea*. Its name might not be easy to say, but it's very easy on the eye as during the period from June to the frosts it becomes an explosion of branching stems each tipped with tiny spires of soft, rose-pink flowers.

Casting my mind back, I used to grow it alongside late-flowering daisies such as asters, rudbeckias and heleniums that like the verbena hark from the prairies of North America. The verbena behaves differently though, as instead of forming clumps it affably self-sows and mingles among its neighbours. The wiry stems and narrow leaves barely cast a shadow so don't rob close company of light, and this trait makes it excellent for giving borders a naturalistic wispiness. It also doubles the flower power of a single patch of soil, which begs the question - how had I let such a fantastic plant fade from my garden and memory?

I guess, like the contents in the back of a car, I'd taken its presence for granted. But no more! And as the football song says, 'it's coming home!'

The importance of labelling seeds

Verbena hastata is easy to grow from seed and at the back end of the growing season the spikes are heavy with ripe kernels that I quickly filed into an old Tic Tac box.

I always hang on to these containers as the flip top makes for easy filling and re-sealing and the box keeps seed dry and safe from being crushed or accidentally going through the washing machine. There's even space on the label to make a note of what's inside.

I've learnt from experience the importance of labelling, as although it seems obvious when you're collecting, the what and why of an envelope/bag/Tic Tac box stuffed with seed will be a mystery by the spring.

Not that I'm leaving my haul of seed for that long. I'm sowing the verbena directly into the ground where I want them to grow. Direct sowing is what plants do in nature, but comes with risks as birds or mice might eat the seed or wet weather wash it away. There's also a good chance that seedlings will get mistaken for weeds.

However, the place I'm sowing the verbena is a guaranteed winner for this seed.

Sowing seed where it has shown it likes growing

The books might say that this verbena only thrives in that much-mentioned medium 'moist well-drained soil' (and what doesn't!) but my Aunty Judith has the best display I've seen, growing from the cracks in her block paving drive.

Plants might not talk but they do communicate via the locations where their seedlings thrive, and my plan is to offer them a similar home in the joints between the stones on my patio.

Plants like cracks in paving because being between the sun-warmed stones is like being in a propagator. However, with less access to 'moist, well-drained soil', instead of reaching their potential shoulder-height, they'll barely come above the knee.

In a patio, shortness is good as it means plants aren't in the way and they'll flower their socks off from an early age. Then, from their toehold amongst the stones, they'll gently spread into other cracks and the garden beyond.

Above: Toby used a Tic Tac box to collect and store seed from his aunt's *Verbena hastata* f. *rosea*.

Replicating the growing preferences of plants helps boost results. Paving slab gaps tend to be very popular

GARDENING

KINGS SEEDS

The people that know about seeds

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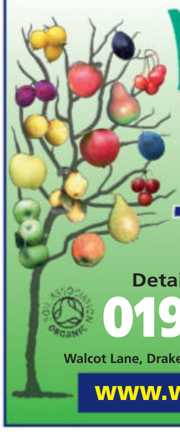

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Fennel seed is easy to save, alongside parsley, coriander and basil

Good seeds to gather

For plants for free, nothing beats collecting and sowing home-saved seed and September is the ideal time. Herbs such as angelica, parsley, basil, fennel and coriander are always on my ‘gather list’, as every spring a fresh supply is needed and all come ‘true’, that is they resemble their parents in appearance and taste.

Not all plants do. Highly bred flowers and vegetables (labelled as F1 on the original seed packet for example) will be inferior to their parents and should be avoided but anything that self sows - and so many plants do - is a sure sign that it’ll be easy to raise from collected seed.

I have a giant-leaved rice paper plant (*Tetrapanax* ‘Rex’) and last year it produced a huge spike of seed. I left it on the plant thinking the kernels would come to nothing and now I’ve two new seedlings growing, with no help from me, in a nearby border. Inevitably, they’re in the wrong place so this year I’m going to collect any ripe seeds and sow in pots in the greenhouse so they can be planted where I want them to grow.

When I worked in a botanic garden, collecting and sorting seeds was my favourite job. Kernels were gathered into paper envelopes and hung from a Sheila Maid® clothes airer in the boiler room to dry before they were ‘winnowed’. This last is a neat trick for separating the seed from the spent flower cases so kernels can be decanted into smaller packets.

To winnow, tip the dry seedheads into a bowl and scrunch between your fingers to break up the flowers. Then gently toss the contents into the air while blowing across the top of the bowl.

Being lighter than the seed, the ‘chaff’ blows away while the kernels fall safely back into the bowl. This is not a job to do indoors, obvs!

Inset image © Toby Buckland

Above: Toby ruled out saving seed from his *Tetrapanax ‘Rex’* until he saw it had readily self-seeded, so this year Toby will be harvesting away

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with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing *AG* contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

Harvest time tips

Bob reveals his secrets for maximising this year's fruit and vegetable pickings

Bob explains how to know when to harvest winter squash and other crops ready for storage

We may be lucky and escape frosts, cruel winds and interminable rain for a long while yet with an 'Indian summer', but doubtless really harsh weather will arrive all too soon.

Fortunately, brassicas, leeks and most root vegetables can be left in the ground until extremely cold weather threatens and only then do we need to protect the roots with insulation and/or lift some to store in a cool, dark, damp place.

Right now though, we'd best hurry to gather any remaining crops that cannot survive outdoors much longer. Tomato plants are likely to soon expire, but if they still have fruits forming, they can be pulled and hung upside down in a dry place (preferably also warm and light) in which position the fruits will further ripen and keep well.

Even green tomatoes can come good, swelling more and turning red if left to hang on the withering vines, and do so far better than when picked. Almost ripe toms can also be sat on a warm sunny windowsill where they'll colour up nicely.

Above: Roots such as turnips and swede are best harvested before cold weather moves in

All images © Shutterstock

Winter squash picking

Squash and pumpkin plants may be kept going a tad longer if covered on cold nights with blankets or sheets, but are best harvested when frost is threatened. To be on the safe side, cut with a length of stem still attached and then store away in the warm and dry.

Potatoes should be dug by now as losses from soil pests can become too great as the thermostat plunges. However, if they can't be lifted immediately, then cover their bed with a plastic sheet to keep off the rain, preventing re-growth, rotting, and mud.

How to protect sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes are very much like potatoes in that soil pest damage is likely to be a problem, but conversely, their yield actually increases significantly if they can be kept growing for longer. In the ground they can be protected with blankets at night, perhaps covered with sheets of clear plastic during the day.

Sweet potatoes in big tubs or bags of compost can simply be moved somewhere warmer, though sadly low light or mould usually gets their tops soon enough, even under cover. If their compost is thoroughly dry, they keep better if they are not emptied out, but for maximum storage remove and cure them somewhere very warm and store them just-warm and never cold or damp.

Harvesting seed and beans

Crops for drying, such as haricot beans, and all those wanted for seed, need to wither on their plants in situ if possible. Wet weather may ruin these so once again a plastic sheet, even opaque black, will keep them dry till they can be safely picked and stored away.

Indeed, anything wanted for seed should be collected and dried before it is shed and lost. Seed pods and heads can be enclosed in organza or fine net bags to catch the seed as another option.

Late pears and apples will want picking within the next few weeks, but remember to only store the perfect ones, and that tiny stalk – known as a pedicel – must stay attached. Many pears may be kept in the warm to ripen over weeks but will be gone by Christmas.

However, with care, late-keeping apples can be stored till spring somewhere cool and dry, ideally in a chest of drawers or dead fridge in a shed or garage.

You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com**

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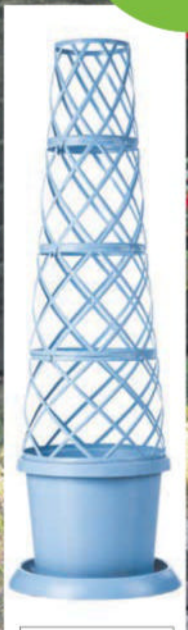

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